

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

THE BOOKS OF **JUDGES AND RUTH**

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EDITORIAL

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FIRST AND LAST

It is readily apparent that the book of the Judges changes its style at chapter 17. The preceding chapters present a largely historical narrative of events which took place over hundreds of years whereas the later chapters detail a few events which occurred in a short space of time. The former part is mostly about Israel's strife with her external enemies but the latter part is about trouble within the nation. What is perhaps most eye-catching, however, is that the events of the closing chapters took place early in the rule of the Judges as the mention of the grandsons of Moses and Aaron (Jud. 18: 30, 28: 30) as well as the capture of Laish (*cf.* Jud. 18: 7 *et seq.* and Josh. 19: 47-8) show. Furthermore, it is clear that the state of affairs described in the final chapters actually obtained throughout the period of the Judges (18: 30-1, 17: 6, 18: 1, 21: 25). Thus the book of Judges presents a two-fold account of this period of Israel's history. On the one hand there is the straight-forward historical record and on the other there is an unveiling of more secret things of moral and spiritual significance.

Such a two-fold account of the same events is not uncommon in the Scriptures. For example, there are two accounts of the creation of man. The tale of Abraham begins with a historical record of his leaving Ur (Gen. 11: 31-2) followed by the Lord's dealing directly with him (Gen. 12: 1-9). On a larger scale the Chronicles deals with the events of the Kings but seen especially from the perspective of the house of God. Without anticipating too much our studies later in the year concerning the latter part of the book we may say that similar perspectives are brought before us in the book of the Judges. In passing we wonder if a similar two-fold account is being kept by the Lord with respect to our own lives, especially in regard to our attitude is the house of God.

A second comparison **suggests** itself from **the fact that the lax** state of spiritual appreciation in Israel described in Judges 17-21 obtained throughout **the period when Israel were alternately at war and at peace** with their **external** enemies; for **the record of the New Covenant** people of God in **the Acts of the Apostles** is one of alternating strife with their **external** enemies **and** difficulties within **the new** nation. **Paul knew** something of this in his personal spiritual **warfare**: "without were fightings, within were fears"¹¹ (2 Cor. 7: 5). We **may** therefore anticipate **such** two-fold sources of strife amongst **the** people of God today, both in **assembly** life **and** in **personal** life.

Finally, we might well ask ourselves **why**, if **such a critical state** of affairs occurred **at the** beginning of **the period of the Judges** and continued throughout it, **the fact** is not **revealed to us** till **the end** of **the book**. We **suggest the answer** to this is to **be found in the fact that the sad state of affairs** so **revealed** is recounted **there as a** contrasting background to **the rise to the throne of the man after God's own heart**, even David, who **had such a clear grasp** of **the purpose of God** in **the house of God** in his **day**. In detail, **the contrast may be seen by comparing the kind of people who inhabit the closing chapters of the book of Judges** with those who **grace the succeeding book of Ruth**; a book written (amongst **many** other reasons) **to herald the rise of David**.

Thus, we **have much to look** forward to in this **year's** studies. Although **much** of it **may be** of a **sombre nature** it is **helpful to remember where** things **are** leading to. **Perhaps**, too, we **may see** something of a similarity between **these things and** our own **day**. We **are** certain **that the darkness of the day, the difficulties of the way, the troubles** from without (**and** within) will **serve** only to form a background against which **the coming of David's Greater Son** will shine **all the brighter**. **He who has framed the Scriptures in such a marvellous way and** who opens **our eyes and hearts** to see something of His works and **ways** in His Word **has framed the ages and placed** our lives in **them** with **as much** precision and purpose. The two **are** not **unrelated** either for **the more we are masters of the written Word the better** equipped we will **be to see** God's purpose in His **Son** in relation to our lives.

I. E. P.

JUDGES AND RUTH: INTRODUCTION AND ORDERING OF THE BOOKS (Judges 1: 1-2; 5; 18: 30; 20: 28; Ruth 1: 1)

From **Aberdeen**: It has been suggested that the story of Ruth took place after Ezra returned with the remnant from Babylon. Examination of the first chapter of Ruth shows that the story took place "when the judges judged"¹ (Ruth 1: 1). Indeed, it has also been suggested that the setting of the story is located in the first half of the book of Judges*

In the book of Judges we are introduced to the behaviour of Israel after the death of Joshua. A new generation grew up after all Joshua's contemporaries had died and this new generation "knew not the Lord"¹¹ (Jud. 2: 10). In their ignorant condition they forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth (Ashtaroth, it is said, were figures which were equivalent of the goddess of fertility). This provoked the Lord to anger and the story of Judges is one of departures, followed by divine anger and, when in a low state, the Lord time after time sends deliverers or "judges".

Trouble came from Israel's failure to drive out completely the inhabitants of the land. These remaining people were to exert evil influence on God's people in days to follow. The fact that great military victories were achieved (Judah slew 10,000 Canaanites in Bezek) proved two things; that the Lord was with His people in battle and that, though small in number, this remnant of the Canaanites was able to cause great vexation to Israel's welfare and spiritual condition. The gravity of leaving the task unfinished is underlined by repetition of the scripture "Ephraim drave not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer... Zebulun drave not out... Asher drave not out...". The Lord was with them as we are told (1: 19, 22) but how far were they prepared to carry out His will? For us this has a very personal application. No doubt we are under continual test. The trouble that a small number of foes can cause is concisely summed up in the saying of Solomon, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the perfumer to send forth a stinking savour" (Ecc. 10: 1).

Perhaps the book of Judges teaches us to beware of the enormous strength of those foes within - the flesh or the old man as it is called. Until our present earthly experience ends there is a need to keep constant check on whatever contrary things remain, things belonging to the old man. In summary, in the time of the Judges the Canaanites were as thorns in the sides of the Israelites and we can see a similar problem in our experiences today.

James Johnson

From Birkenhead: The book of **Judges** is more than just a historical record. It recounts God's dealings with **Israel and** other nations, illustrating and revealing His **character and** work. It covers roughly the period from the **death** of Joshua to the **rise of the monarchy under Saul**. The period was one of tribal discord, **defeat and** famine, interspersed with merciful deliverance by God in response to the **penitent cry** of His people. Placed alongside such events is the entrancing story of **Ruth (Ruth 1: 1)**, indicating that there were still those who **feared God and** worshipped Him.

In **Judges 1: 1** we have "after the death of Joshua" and then in **2: 6** "when Joshua had sent the people away". It appears, however, that events are not recounted in a strictly chronological order. Instances of this can also be found later in the book.

The author interprets events on the basis of a clear philosophy of history: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14: 34). If a people are to prosper, they must obey the will of God, keeping His laws and avoiding the idolatry of other nations. In any age, disobedience to God will lead to adversity and oppression, whilst true repentance will lead to forgiveness and restoration.

The book of Joshua makes it clear that while the Israelites succeeded in overrunning the country, there was much left to be done (Josh. 23: 5). In Joshua's lifetime, Canaan had been assigned to individual tribes, who were told that they must fight to gain their respective territories (Josh. 13: 1-7). In **Judges 1** we can see how the tribes began a protracted 'mopping-up' campaign, which was intended to rid the land of all hostile influences. Judah took the lead and enlisted the help of Simeon in an attempt to capture Jerusalem. Joseph, too, advanced against Bethel. The Lord gave them success, and subsequently they destroyed a number of Canaanite outposts in the south and in the centre. Their success was short lived, however, for the Jebusites regained Jerusalem soon afterwards, whilst Gaza, Askelon and Ekron were captured by the Philistines several years later.

Many tribes were now distanced from the central sanctuary and there was, no doubt, the temptation to accommodate elements of Canaanite Baalism within their faith. As the nation adjusted from a semi-nomadic to an agrarian way of life, it may have seemed good sense to adopt the fertility cult of those who lived around them.

The author of Judges, however, emphasizes the need for rigid separation from the Canaanites and the people are reminded of their covenant obligation to rid the land of the corrupting presence of the

Canaanites (Ex. 23: 33). As a consequence of **their** failure to **do so**, **the Canaanites were** to become a continuous source of conflict and temptation. We would do **well** to **learn** from their mistakes **by** seeking to distance ourselves from **the** influences of **the** world, and those who despise **the** worship of **the** Lord.

J.D. Williams

From Birmingham: The book of **Judges** takes its name from the 12 spirit anointed leaders **the** Lord raised **up** to deliver **the** nation. The young nation **had** no stable **central** government **and**, forsaking **the** Lord, it **became** easy **prey** for **enemy** invasion [Comment 1].

Judges is a record of **the dark** ages of **the** declension of **Israel** in **the land**. The people forsook **the** Lord (**2: 13**); **the** Lord forsook **the** people (**2: 23**). The **key** verse is "**In** those **days there was** no king in **Israel: every man** did **that** which **was** right in his own eyes¹¹ (**17: 6**). **The** record of **Israel's** failure in **the land** covers **the** time from **Joshua** to **Saul**. The book of **Judges** begins in compromise and ends in **anarchy and** confusion [Comment 2].

Contrasted with **the** book of **Joshua** which spoke of victory, freedom, faith **and** progress this book **speaks** of **defeat**, servitude, unbelief, sorrow **and** weakness.

In chapters 1 to 2: 5 we have **the seeds** of **Israel's** subsequent sin **and** failure, **where** **the** people failed to drive out **the** Canaanites (**1: 19, 21, 27, 28**). This would **lead** to **defeat and deep** sorrow, for **God** also would not drive those nations out, **but, they were** to **be as** thorns in their sides and their gods **were** to **be a snare** to **them** (**2: 13**) (see **2 Tim. 2: 9-10**). The people **wept**, having no power to withstand **the** enemy; **such** is his power over **us** **when** we compromise with him.

Chapters **2: 6 - 16: 3** give us **the 12** main **characters** and an account of **what** we could call **the** ¹sin cycle¹:

1. Sliding: **Israel** forsook **the** Lord, followed other gods and provoked **the** Lord to **anger**.
2. Servitude: **He** delivered **them** into **the** hands of spoilers and **sold** **them** into **the** hands of their enemies.
3. Supplication: **He** **heard** their groaning and vexation under oppression.
4. Salvation: The Lord raised **up** **judges** who **saved** **them**, for **the** Lord **was** with **the** **judges**.
5. Security: **Rest** for **the** period of **the** **judges**¹ life.

In **the last part** of **the** book we have **the** account of **the** idolatry of

Micah and the Danites (17: 1 - 18: 31) followed by the united elderhood dealing with lewdness and folly of the Benjamites¹ treatment of the Levite and his concubine (19: 1 - 20: 48).

In the book of Judges we learn not only that God is righteous, (11: 27) and deals with sin but also that He is gracious and longsuffering. The 'sin-cycle'¹ was repeated over a period of 450 years (Acts 13: 19-20). We learn, too, that God commands faith (Heb. 11: 32-33) and that He is sovereign in raising up judges and moving the nations.

Brian Tugwell, Robert Wood

From Leigh and Bolton: We considered the book of Judges to be comprised of three main sections:

1. 1: 1 - 3: 6 the introduction or prelude,
2. 3: 7 - 16: 31 the succession of judges,
3. 17: 1 - 21: 25 the (early) condition of the people.

The initial section: There was discussion as to whether the initial section began with a summing up of events during or after the death of Joshua. Chapter 1: 1 clearly states "and it came to pass after the death of Joshua"¹. However, incidents referred to within the scope of the following verses correspond to events recorded in the book of Joshua, and so during the life of Joshua. Clearly Judges 1: 10-15 deals with the incident of the request of Caleb's daughter which parallels Joshua 15: 13-19: Judges 1: 19 mentions "chariots of iron"¹¹ recalling Joshua 17: 14-18: Judges 1: 20 concerns the granting of Hebron to Caleb as in Joshua 14: 13-15: and Judges 1: 27, 28 can be laid alongside Joshua 17: 11-13. In fact, we read of Joshua sending the people away in Judges 2: 6 and his death is again recorded in v. 8. Therefore our concluding view was that the first few verses (1-7) immediately follow Joshua's death as stated in 1: 1, and that the material presented in the rest of the chapter was a general summary of the campaign conducted under Joshua with the failure to possess the land fully emphasized.

After the announcement of the angel given in the first five verses of chapter 2, the remainder of this initial section is taken up with an overview of the consequences of Israel's failure to completely drive out the indigenous peoples. Overall the first section of the book can be broadly subdivided into the campaign of Joshua and the consequences of failure.

The middle section: This central section we viewed as giving the main content of the book. It describes the succession of deliverances that was necessitated by the failure to comply with the divine injunction to

destroy **utterly the nations of the land (Deut. 7: 2)**. It is a section **very largely taken up with a pattern of decline and revival**. Failure to **carry out the will of God fully** inevitably resulted in compromise in their separation **and service**. **Even as they had been warned, what they left undone caught up with them later**. We noted **the warning for our own spiritual warfare and service**. **If we come short in the matter of doing the Lord's will we leave ourselves open to compromise in the matter of our separation to the Lord**. **And if, as individuals, we tolerate pockets of resistance to the Holy Spirit in any areas of our lives we preclude for ourselves the fulness of blessing associated with victorious Christian living**.

The final section: The third and final section **we felt** describes conditions **that pertained in the land at an earlier period than that following the period covered by the central section**. In this connection **we derived help from the verses 18: 30 and 20: 28 which were given for our consideration**. **We took it that the Phinehas referred to in, for example, Joshua 22: 13 and in Judges 20: 28 were one and the same**. That being **the case, since this Phinehas was high priest in the days of Joshua, this indicates that the events recorded in this section of the book actually took place soon after the death of Joshua rather than much later**. This would seem to be confirmed by **the R. V. text of 18: 30**. **We noted that Newberry places chapter 17 onwards chronologically some twenty years only after the death of Joshua and before the time of Othniel**. Thus this **latter section we took as revealing the dramatic decline of Israel after the death of Joshua and the elders who outlived him, and before the Judges were raised up**. A tragic picture of idolatry and immorality is painted **due largely, it was considered, to the lack of an authoritative figure in the Moses - Joshua tradition**.

As to **the book of Ruth, the opening verse of that book places its contents "in the days when the judges judged"**. It therefore belongs to **the period of the middle section of Judges (Newberry identifies it with the time of Deborah and Barak)**. It was observed **that the Hebrew Bible actually includes the book of Ruth in the book of Judges** [Comment 3].

Thus overall we found ourselves in broad agreement with the relative chronology of Newberry while not endorsing his absolute chronology [Comment 4].

B. D. Johnston

From Derby: The book of **Judges can be divided** into five sections*

1. **1: 2-5** tells how **the land had** only **been partly** conquered in the time of Joshua owing to **a** lack of faithfulness **and** obedience. The **messenger** of God reproached **the** people with their faithlessness when **they were assembled at** Bochim.
2. **2: 6 - 3: 6.** The people continued to neglect God's **laws** increasingly **after** Joshua died, **but** God **was** still sovereign **and overruled all that** happened **as a result of the** Canaanites continuing to dwell in **the land.**
3. **3: 7 - 16: 31.** The main section about **the twelve judges.**
4. **Ch. 17 - 18.** This appendix includes **the** story of Micah's idolatry **and** shows how **far** Jonathan, **the** grandson of Moses, **had turned away** from God.
5. **Ch. 19 - 21.** This second appendix is about **the deed** of Gibeah. We see **the great** contrast **between** Jonathan **and** his cousin, Phinehas **who** was **the** grandson of Aaron.

It has been pointed out **that the tale** of Micah is not **in** chronological **order** **but** is **here** given **after the** history to **lay bare the** lawlessness in religious **matters** which prevailed **in the days of the judges.**

In **verse 1 the 'And'** connects this book with **the last.** The Lord chose **the** tribe of **Judah** to fight first. They **were** a powerful and important tribe who **had** been specially **blessed by** Jacob. **Judah asked** Simeon to **help.** They **were** both sons of Leah. The punishment **they gave** to the lord of **Bezek** deprived him of his fleetness of **foot,** of drawing **the** bow and wielding **the** sword. So **he was** seen to **be treated as he had treated** others.

Although the tribes took **Jerusalem** they either did not **take** it completely or it **was recaptured.** It is called **Jebus** in **19: 11 - 12** [Comment 5].

Then **they went** 'down' to fight. Possibly **they were** able to **start** in the hills as the general expression **was went 'up'** to fight [Comment 6].

Hebron was formerly Mamre. It was an important place and Caleb had to refer to his unbroken strength before he could begin to conquer the region (Josh. 14: 11).

When Othniel was given Achsah for a wife it was she who asked for springs of water showing herself to be a more provident person than her husband.

Judah did not drive out the inhabitants of the valley. Their faith was weakened when they saw the chariots. The children of Benjamin were not able to drive out the Jebusites. Jerusalem was one part of the hill country that was not conquered.

Bethel was in an important geographical position and it also had sacred connections with Abraham and Jacob. The spies successfully bribed the man coming out of the city with the promise of personal safety if he helped them. The rest of the chapter expands on the fact that the Canaanites were not wholly driven out of the land and as a direct result of this many disasters overtook the Israelites. The blessings of the conditional promises which God had made were withdrawn because of their disobedience. They wept when they heard the message of the angel of the Lord but their repentance was not long lasting. They were soon utterly to forsake the Lord again. However, the Lord in His great mercy delivered them time after time when they cried unto Him in their great distress.

G. W. Conway

From Liverpool: *Prevailing Conditions:* "After the death of Joshua¹¹ is the setting for these two books both chronologically and spiritually. In the opening verses we are introduced to the recurring theme throughout: a catalogue of what the Lord did and what the people of God did not do, i.e. promises, instructions, disobedience and disaster. It is sobering to realise that these events took place so soon after the conquest of Canaan and the wilful disobedience of the people took place with the promises of God ringing in their ears and the mighty power of God as recent history!

Failure to defeat the people of the land followed inevitably from their failure to remain loyal to the Lord and in turn led to the pitiful plight described in later chapters so that their sin led to their

punishment. It is clear that selective obedience counted as disobedience and the introduction concludes with God declaring that they would be unable to drive out the natives of the land who would become "thorns in your sides" (RV, NIV) or "adversaries"¹¹ (RSV) (2: 3). It is clearly a lesson for the people of God today that not only will we inevitably suffer as a result of disobedience and wrong choices but that we have to live with the consequences of such actions.

Solving and Reaping: Not only in the overall introduction is the eternal truth seen that a man reaps what he sows but also in the account of the mutilation of Adoni-Bezek who acknowledged that he had received justice at the hands of the Israelites. In God's greater purposes the people of God were to be agents of divine judgement against the prevailing ungodliness and sin revealed in the depraved and disgusting practices of the Canaanite inhabitants. Sadly the people of God instead were attracted to the very sin they were to have destroyed.

D. J. Webster

From Newcastle **upon Tyne:** Joshua (Josh. 24), had brought all the elders of Israel, the heads of families, the judges and officers to make a covenant under which they had agreed to banish all the foreign gods that were among them and turn their hearts to the Lord. At that time this would not have referred to infiltration of foreign gods into the people of Israel. Rather it referred to the foreign gods of the indigenous people that were still living among the people of Israel in Canaan.

It appears that it was not possible to banish foreign gods by gentle persuasion. The indigenous people had to be driven out from the territory. Judah led this campaign under instruction from the Lord (1: 2) but it was intended that others would follow (1: 1). Some tribes considered that putting the indigenous people to forced labour would be sufficient but the wording of the account (1: 27 - 28) indicates that this was not as acceptable as completely driving them out.

Gilgal had been the base camp to which Joshua and the Israelites had repeatedly returned. The instructions that Joshua received may all have been received at Gilgal, so much so that there was an

association **between the place and God speaking. It was here that the Commander of the army of the Lord spoke to Joshua (Josh. 5: 13 - 15).**

When it says (2: 1) that "the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim" we may take it that the centre of operations was moving from Gilgal.

Representatives of the nation were gathered at Bochim and it was a place where sacrifices were made (2: 4-5). If the Septuagint is correct in associating Bochim with Bethel, [Comment 7] then it is significant that the angel visited a place where the command of the Lord had been carried out (1: 22 - 25). The message referred to the poor performance of the nation as a whole and not especially to the inhabitants of Bochim.

It is not often that we read of angels making a journey. The departure of the special presence of God in Gilgal must have been as distinct as the arrival in Bochim. The departure from Gilgal may have been because of the poor spiritual condition that was developing among the Benjamites (20: 28).

P. J. Stoner

From Nottingham: We do not know for certain who was the author of the Book of Judges. There are certain verses which might be considered to throw some light on the time of writing. For example, "all the time"¹¹ (18: 30 - 21) could indicate the record was written after that time was over, i. e. after the events of 1 Sam. 4. Also the statement "in those days there was no king in Israel" (17: 6 and elsewhere) suggests the book was written after the establishment of the monarchy. Some think Samuel might have been the author, but we have no confirmation. The book certainly carries on the chronological record of Israel from the events of Joshua's day, and it is the message of the book rather than its author which is important.

Just as we have some details of the death of Moses in the last chapter of Deuteronomy, so are we told, albeit briefly, of the death of Joshua in the last chapter of the book that bears his name. As

the death of Moses is **alluded** to in **chapter 1** of Joshua, so is **the death** of Joshua mentioned in **Judges 1: 1**. **Yet there** is a contrast **between the** spirit of **the** contents of **the** book of Joshua **and that** of Judges. The former displays **the** attitude of faith on **the part** of Israel in **the** Lord their God, showing God-given courage, obedience to His will, **and a** determination to **further** His purposes. **In the latter** we find a gradual decline, a **lack** of faith in God, a disobedience to His commands and failing to realise His purposes resulting in a spiritual and material **poverty**.

How did this **come about**? At first, **Judah** seems determined to pursue **the** command of **the** Lord and in **chapter 1** we read of their success. However, **the word** of the Lord was **not** carried out by **all the** tribes as **repeatedly** we read that one and another did not drive out **the** people that occupied **the** land. **The fact** that these nations, (e.g. **the** Canaanites dwelling among **the** Ephraimites), **dwelt** among **the** tribes instead of being completely driven out **led** to their becoming a thorn in **the** flesh to **Israel** and also **caused** that nation to **be** attracted to their gods **and** evil practices.

Another reason for Israel's decline is given in **Judges 2: 10** "... and **there** arose another generation **after** **them** which **knew** not **the** Lord, nor **yet** **the** work which **He** **had** wrought for **Israel**¹¹. They failed to **remember**. God **had** commanded Israel to **remember** **ail** **the** way **He** **had** led **them** (**Deut. 8: 2**), and failure to do this along with losing sight of **the** wonders **He** **had** wrought resulted in a **lack** of faith in respect of **further** exploits, **and** a yielding to **the** temptations around.

There **are**, of course, **parallels** in **our** present dispensation **and** experiences. It is important **that** we **remember** **the** work **the** Lord wrought in **the** hearts of brethren and sisters about a **century** ago **at** **the** time of **the** inception of **the** Fellowship **and** see afresh **the** vision of **the** house of God **they** saw. Also, **let** us **remember** **the** wonders **He** has wrought for us. **Further**, we learn from **the** book of Judges **that**, as we are exhorted in **2 Tim. 1: 13** we must "Hold **the** pattern of *sound* (**healthful** - **marg.**) words..." and **guard** **all** **that** has **been** committed to us. It was compromise **and** failure to **observe** **all** **that** **the** Lord **had** commanded **that** brought trouble to **Israel** (*cf.* **Josh. 1: 7**) **and** if we **dabble** in compromise today we **shall** find ourselves in similar circumstances to **Israel** in **the** days of **the** Judges. **May** it not **be** said of us **that** "every

man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21: 25).

Although outside **the scope of this brief paper it is interesting and instructive to consider the various nations and persons that God raised up to chastise His people, and, having regard to secular history, see again the wonderful way in which God overrules among the nations to further His purposes.**

R. Hickling

From Wishaw: In the book of Joshua we read about the conquest of Palestine; yet it was true that much land still lay before them. This is the point at which the book of Judges takes up the history of Israel. It was commendable that the children of Israel "asked of the Lord" (v.1) and the lesson is plain to ail who read. It was felt that if Judah was directly told by the Lord to go up first to fight against the Canaanites then they should not have sought the help of Simeon, but rather Judah should have been willing to carry out their allotted task [Comment 8] •

The incident with Adoni-bezek who had cut off the thumb and big toes of 70 kings and then had his own cut off reminds us of "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"¹¹ (Gal. 6: 7).

The "chariots of iron"¹ seemed to present an insurmountable obstacle to the tribe of Judah; for it states "he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley"¹¹ (v.19). This is in direct conflict with "thou shalt drive out the Canaanites though they have chariots of iron" (Josh. 17: 18). Applying this today, as Christians we should realise that victory must be on our side, for "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Is. 54: 17).

So far as the incident about Bethel is concerned (vv. 22-26), it was felt that those in the house of Joseph should not have spared the man who was coming out of the city. It was a similar situation to that of Saul, who spared Agag. In both cases those left proved to be a snare to those who spared them[Comment 9]. There can be no compromise in the things of God. What God commands we must do.

The children of Manasseh put the Canaanites to task work (v.28). It was suggested that wrong motives (perhaps of material gain) were prompting the people so to act. Again such compromise only led to trouble for God's people.

This chapter reads like a catalogue of disasters - "they drove not out... they drove not out... they drove not out...". The source of the disasters was spiritual disobedience. Because the people failed to drive out the nations when the opportunity presented itself, then the time came (2: 3) when the Lord said He would not drive them out.

In contrast 2: 1 contains a very lovely promise "I will never break My covenant with you"¹¹. Our God is faithful. Alas, Israel was not. There multiplied in a land that should have been uniquely for the worship of God, many varied altars and deities. Surely we should learn from these things.

M. D. Bentham, M. D. Macdonald

COMMENTS

1. (Birmingham): Centralised government is not necessarily essential for stable government. The people of God today have no centralised government nor is it intended that they should. This may well be one of the parallels between the rule of God that was intended in the Land of Israel (prior to the rise of the kings) and that of the people of God today. How stability and unity failed to be attained is one of the themes of the book of Judges.

2. (Birmingham): As this month's issue shows, however, the end of the book of Judges takes place at the beginning, so to speak, which goes to show that the book has been written in a particular way and therefore for a particular purpose.

3. (Bolton and Leigh): The Hebrew Bible includes the book of Ruth in the "Writings"¹¹ as one of the Megilloth or the Five Rolls

along with the Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther where it was placed second. Although the grouping of the books is not Inspired, since it was in this position in the Bible the Lord used we might well wonder if it is meant to be compared with the Song of Songs. As will be known the Hebrew Bible comprises the books of our Bible grouped in 24 books. There appears to have been current a further grouping into 22 books (the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet) made by joining Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah which is referred to by Josephus and later Christian writers. It may be this to which friends in Bolton and Leigh refer but this is not what we know of today as the Hebrew Bible.

4. (Bolton and Leigh): It is not, of course, our objective to prove or disprove the chronology of Newberry but to learn what is evident to the humblest of readers of the Scriptures who compares scripture with scripture (Prov. 1: 2). We will all be obliged to friends in Bolton and Leigh for setting this forth so clearly.

6. (Derby): Yes perhaps, this rather sums up the days of the Judges. When we consider how poor a grasp the people had in that day of the importance of the Altar and the Place of the Altar and contrast that with the grasp that David had of these things we might well wonder how different things might have been if they had captured and held Jerusalem from the first. In saying this we are not forgetful of the house of God being set up at Shiloh in Ephraim in fulfilment of Gen. 48: 19-20.

6. (Derby): Does this not show the importance of Jerusalem? It may be that simple physical eminence is indicated but it is hard not to see the expression as a forerunner of what was to come when the house of God would be there. Men on earth can only go down from the house of God.

7. (Newcastle upon Tyne): The place is called Bochim in the narrative prior (2: 1) to its receiving that name (2: 5) suggesting that that was the name of the place at the time of the writing of the book of the Judges. But the name Bethel is that by which the place was known throughout the ensuing history of Israel and

therefore we do not see that Bochim replaced it. Thus we conclude that it is extremely unlikely that Bochim was really Bethel. Certainly there is no indication in the Scriptures that this was so.

8. (Wishaw): Simeon's inheritance was in the midst of Judah's (Josh. 19: 1-9) therefore joint action may have been inevitable. Further, the Lord clearly and immediately crowned their actions with success (Jud. 1: 4) and so, in the absence of condemnation, we would not like to say that Judah was in the wrong.

9. (Wishaw): The inhabitants of the land were to be driven out (Ex. 23: 28) and cast out (Deut. 7: 1 and 27: 22) with the objective not only of cleansing the land of their evil practices but also of ensuring those practices would not lead to the corruption of the Israelites indwelling their new land (Deut. 7: 4; 20: 18). Those who were to be put to the sword were those whom the Lord delivered up (Deut. 7: 2) or gave to them (Deut. 20: 16; cf. v. 16) rather than those whom the Lord drove out. Thus we would suggest that those peoples who resisted the Lord's judgement on them through His people were the ones put to death. Thus, we would further suggest, the man who came out of the city at Bethel was not a resister and therefore was spared but, in effect, driven out to the land of the Hittites where he (whatever his form of worship) could not corrupt the people of God. It may be of significance that a similar distinction was to be made concerning the cities that were far off (Deut. 7: 10 - 18) though in their case an actual offer of clemency was to be made prior to the battle. No such offer was to be made before attacking the cities of the nations of the land.

I. E. P.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8802

GOD IS FAITHFUL

Joshua and the elders knew the Lord by personal experience of the great work which He had wrought for Israel. They had known the blessing of God, as having served Him.

When their influence was taken out of the way, and the next generation forsook the God of their fathers, the Lord was not indifferent towards the children of Israel, but His anger was kindled against them.

All this was as the Lord had spoken (Judges 2: 15). Yet the "word of the Lord abideth for ever", also a word of promise, despite human failure. Thus their enemies were only permitted to go so far in causing oppression, and it was of the Lord's doing when a judge was raised up. The Lord could have driven every nation out hastily, but each fresh generation had to experience the "fight of the faith". Men who had never seen Joshua, could cry unto the Lord. They had undergone necessary chastening, but the Lord then saved them by the hand of Othniel from the king of Aram of the two Rivers.

Moab also was a sore trial to the succeeding generation, and Israel served Eglon for eighteen years. Nevertheless, and for this we praise His Name, the Lord raises up those who are bowed down.

The "message from God" was an unexpected one for Eglon, and defied his security arrangements. Ehud on the other hand needed not to be ashamed of his craftsmanship, his handling of the sword, nor of his timing. But the consequence of that solitary turning at historic Gilgal had still to be faced, when ten thousand warriors came to seek vengeance. With all boldness Ehud said, "Follow after me", fully vindicated by the subsequent record that "there escaped not a man" of the enemy.

We are not told why it was that Shamgar used an ox-goad rather than a sword. Ostensibly he was equipped only to drive cattle. Shamgar, however, was prepared to use what he had on behalf of the Lord's people, and so by him God wrought a notable victory over six hundred Philistines.

In the glorious days of David, Israel's king triumphantly dedicated the silver and gold "of Aram, and of Moab and of the children of Ammon and of the Philistines and of Amalek". In the hour of trial David was convinced that there could be no victory without faith in God (Ps. 60: 11). God was pleased to reward his faith, for the Lord gave victory to David withersoever he went (2 Sam. 8: 12, 14).

In this dispensation the sojourners of the Dispersion experiencing the grief of manifold temptations were assured by the apostle Peter that the Lord's purpose was to prove the faith of His elect. Although as yet they saw not the Christ in glory they loved Him notwithstanding, and rejoiced through faith in a living hope. Under the old economy the death of a judge was repeatedly succeeded by departure of the people from the Lord. By contrast the resurrection of Christ if rightly apprehended inspires a hope which calls for holiness of living before the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work (1 Pet. 1: 17).

E. A.

RULE OF THE JUDGES: OTHNIEL, EHUD AND SHAMGAR (Judges 2: 6-3: 31)

From Aberdeen: Did Israel become complacent when they were under no immediate threat of war? Judges 2: 6 might suggest that every man was away minding his own inheritance and so alertness for war had now faded. Judges 3: 1-2 may be focussing attention on this human tendency to complacency.

"Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them, even as many as had not known all the wars of Canaan,... to teach them war, at the least such as beforetime knew nothing thereof,... ". Human nature operates in a predictable tendency towards complacency when there are no battles to fight. Throughout Israel's history, the times when there were no battles were the times when Israel showed the greatest proneness to turn aside from serving God, to their own ways. This tendency is seen even in the resettled remnant from Babylon. Haggai asked God's question, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your cieled houses, while this house lieth waste?" Settled complacency had set in, in the work of re-building God's house. No doubt there is a lesson here for God's house today.

So, it is refreshing to read about Caleb's nephew, Othniel: "he went out to war" (Judges 3: 10). Such men were made clear leaders by God Himself. They were clearly marked out because the Spirit of God came upon them (e. g. Judges 3: 10; 11: 29; 13: 25). Thus they were able to judge Israel and also lead them in battle against their enemies.

The men whom God uses are sometimes different from the majority,

like Ehud, who was left-handed. The suspense of Ehud's secret message to Eglon is an incident which causes us to look for the hidden hand of God: delicately marking out deliverance for His people. What is remarkable, was not only the hand of God guiding Ehud, but also the fact that it was this same God who had "strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel" (Judges 3: 12). The intervening hand of God is clearly evident in these mixed circumstances affecting the Israel nation.

According to dates given by Newberry it would appear that both Shamgar and Deborah fought battles during the 80 years in which the land had rest (3: 30). This would mean that the land had rest until the Midianites began their seven years' oppression which preceded Gideon's commissioning.

James Johnson

From Birkenhead: During his lifetime, Joshua displayed a deep loyalty to the Lord, and an integrity of conduct which influenced the whole nation. Even after his death the nation continued to serve the Lord faithfully, and so enjoyed a period of peace. Here we can see the value of God-fearing men and women amongst God's people; and absence of wise leadership can result in rapid spiritual decline.

The Israelites, however, must have observed the wealth of their Canaanite neighbours, and perhaps they attributed such prosperity to Baal, the fertility god. Consequently they were led away from their faith in the true and living God whom they could not see. At a later stage in their history the Israelites were challenged on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) about this issue.

The generation of Israelites who turned aside to Baal must have heard much concerning the mighty exploits of God in the conquest of the land, but they themselves had not witnessed His power in battle. It is important to experience a personal relationship with God if our faith is to be of any calibre. If our conviction is weak, we will soon look for satisfaction in material comforts. Although we can learn much from the experience of older saints we should never depend upon their faith at the expense of our own.

The Israelites in turning away from God had broken their covenant with Him, prostituting themselves to other gods. (Apostasy was often spoken of as spiritual adultery, since the relationship of Israel to God is sometimes spoken of in terms of marriage (Jer. 3: 6-12) [Comment 1]). God punished the rebellion of His people with defeat and oppression. As the Israelites groaned under the affliction of their oppressors, however, God took pity and raised up deliverers. These 'judges' executed the judgement of God on behalf of the nation. This took various forms over this period of the nation's history.

The judge was not elected by popular choice. It was not an office that

could be inherited. He had to be chosen by God and empowered by Him for his special duties and demanding responsibilities by the endowment of God's Spirit. Many of the judges had handicaps and defects but in God's hands these were never a hindrance [Comment 2].

Othniel was raised to deliver the people who cried for deliverance from the oppression that came from Mesopotamia (Judges 3: 8). The Spirit came upon him and the enemy was overpowered when he went forth to battle. Subsequently Eglon, king of Moab was used as an oppressor and Ehud from the tribe of Benjamin was used to bring deliverance. Subterfuge and a subsequent battle using Israelites from Ephraim overwhelmed the enemy. Shamgar was used to deliver from a Philistine oppression which appears to run concurrent with that of Jabin (see Judges 5: 6). It seems possible that the judges were local heroes rather than national figures [Comment 3].

The Israelites often forgot their miraculous deliverance after a comparatively short time, and they continued to be unfaithful. It seems that their repentance must have been superficial, for they turned away from God so rapidly after seeing His hand at work on their behalf. Gratitude for deliverance ought to be expressed in lifelong dedication.

The nation was tested by the presence of enemies, and they had to fight continually to suppress them. The Sidonians, Hivites, and Hittites were in the North; the Philistines occupied the coastal strip, and the Canaanites, Amorites, Perizzites and Jebusites were in various areas within the land. Because of their failure to rid the land completely of their enemies, the Israelites frequently found themselves in the clutches of an alien power. It is important not to underestimate the strength of our great adversary, the Devil, who is pictured by Peter "as a roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5: 8).

There was also the temptation to intermingle with Canaanite neighbours and enter into mixed marriages (Judges 3: 5, 6). This was an offence to God and the basic principle still obtains today for Paul writes on this matter to the saints in Corinth (2 Cor. 6: 14 -7: 1).

J. D. Williams, R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: Credit is given to the spiritual calibre of Joshua whose influence caused the people to serve the Lord all his days and those of the elders who outlived him. This influence is an important aspect of leadership which commands the allegiance of the people to the Lord. Paul said "after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in" (Acts 20: 29). Similarly Hezekiah (2 Kings 18) removed the idols from among the people in contrast to Asa (1 Kings 15: 14) whose heart was perfect before God yet he was unable to exert the same degree of influence, for the high places were not taken away.

After Joshua's departure there was rapid decline (2: 11) further exacerbated sadly by this generation who unlike their fathers had not experienced the great works of the Lord (2: 10) nor known all the wars of Canaan (3: 1). Spiritual experience is not inherited. There must be the personal experience of God. We may help by removing obstacles and providing a framework for spiritual education, but the experience is personal.

It is quite remarkable how God turned those things which should never have been left in the land to prove (test) Israel by them (3: 1). Presumably this was so that those who had not experienced war would experience it and learn the need to resist evil and feel their dependence on God.

Their testing did not bring forth gold (1 Pet. 1: 7) but compromise with the nations around. They dwelt among the Canaanites and took their daughters to wife. Some might regard it as small compromise but with undeniable consequences. There were periods of revival as God in response to the cries of the people raised up saviours: Othniel (Force of God) Ehud (unifier) and Shamgar (cupbearer).

Othniel speaks of the Spirit's power to enable. ^M"Ye shall receive power (i. e. force) after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1: 8). Power is vital that every aspect of service should be with power. Upon Othniel came the Spirit of God and he judged... and he went out to war and the Lord delivered. Prior to this Othniel had proved his worth in the private and personal sphere. He smote (to strike) and took (to capture) Debir (Heb. word murrain comes from this) (Ex. 9: 6) and Kiriath Sepher (City of books) [Comment 4].

In his victory he gained a wife who sought a blessing (1: 15). Not content with a position in the land they sought constant refreshing. There must be fresh experiences with God. Past experiences are not enough for present need.

Under Othniel the people knew victory, prevailing victory which the land knew for the next 40 years. Othniel was the source of victory for the people. On his death gone was the force of God, the Spirit of God, freedom, and rest.

The enemy was strengthened as the people did that which was evil. They could not withstand the power of their enemies. Moab is to us a picture of the world and Eglon speaks of the flesh.

The people served (were enslaved to) Eglon, the king of Moab. It is perhaps Satan's most effective tool to draw away the minds of men - the flesh which wars against the Spirit. Eglon gathered more enemies against Israel and Israel were smitten and possessed. Jericho the place of past victory by faith fell into enemy hands. Eglon had crossed Jordan and apparently built his place. What freedom for the flesh this implies!

The people cried and God raised up Ehud a man who was left-handed. This may speak of weakness and subjection (see Song of Songs 2: 6). His power is made perfect in weakness and God visits the proud but gives grace to the humble [Comment 2]. Ehud was a man used of God.

The people thought of compromise (vv. 15, 18) but Ehud was a man of the Word (v. 16; see Heb. 4: 12) and took the two-edged sword and plunged it deep into the flesh of Eglon, there to remain. "Mortify therefore your members" (see mg. Col. 3: 5). After that Ehud the unifier blew a trumpet "and the children of Israel went down with him" (v. 27).

Trumpets were used to call the congregation together. Their sound made known the mind of the Lord (Num. 10), e. g. to gather together, to go out to war. If the trumpet gives an uncertain voice who shall prepare (1 Cor. 14: 8)? Ehud's voice was clear, decisive, and it was obeyed:

- (a) the people went down with him
- (b) they went down after him
- (c) and they took the fords
- (d) he went before them.

Unity is necessary for victory too and unity is achieved as the leaders lead and the sheep follow.

R. Woods

From Bolton **and Leigh**: Chapter 2: 6-10 brings before us the closing years of the life of Joshua, confirming our view that the first two chapters of the book were written as a prelude or introduction to the main narrative. We felt that verse 10 had a significant bearing on what was to follow; "and there arose another generation... which knew not the Lord, nor yet the work He had wrought for Israel". It seemed to us that this lack of knowledge could be blamed on the failure of priests, elders and parents, in their responsibility of both keeping the Lord's commandments and teaching them to succeeding generations. Perhaps a pointer to this being so, is that, the last recorded occasion of the keeping of the passover was in the days of Joshua (Josh. 5: 10). The passover was a specific occasion when the mighty works of God could be recounted to following generations.

Chapter 2: 11-19 presents a depressing downward spiral of failure, described for us in these verses as a repeating cycle of events. The cycle is broadly that of apostasy and aggression, which could be broken down into the following steps: apostasy, repression, supplication, salvation and rest. This is a pattern we will see repeated again and again in this book, as the careers of successive judges unfold.

Chapter 2: 20-21 contains the action of God due to the failure of His people, in that, He caused to remain in the land a substantial residue of

other nations, with the express purpose of trying and proving His people. Verses 1-6 of chapter 3 list for us the various nations that God left, to be used in the proving of Israel. Added to the proving of His people, God had yet another purpose in not completely driving out the occupying nations of the Land. This was, that He might teach the art of warfare to succeeding generations (3: 12). Being proved in and contending for their inheritance, was designed to develop character and obedience among the tribes of Israel. Surely the spiritual lesson taught in these things should speak volumes to us, regarding our spiritual warfare (Eph. 6: 10-18).

The list of enemies given in the first six verses of chapter 3, added to those that are seen in the rest of the book, show us that Israel's foes were both internal and external. So it is with the foes of our faith today, opposition arises from within and without. It is noted that intermarrying with these internal enemies (3: 6) was one of the main causes of Israel's apostasy, surely drawing pointed lessons for us about our own separated position. The rituals of the Canaanite fertility cults, with their appeal to the base instincts of men and women, prove to us that the lusts of the flesh are ever active.

Chapter 3: 7-11 brings us to the first of the judges. Othniel, the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb (1: 12, 13). Some of our group felt that Othniel was the first *named* judge, suggesting that there may have been others before him. The majority view however, was that Othniel was the first judge named or otherwise. It is recorded of Othniel that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. This is also said of other judges such as Jephthah and Samson, but not of others like Ehud and Shamgar. It was felt by most that this would be an experience common to all the judges raised up by God.

Chapter 3: 11, 12 shows the cycle of apostasy through to rest beginning all over again, resulting this time in the raising up of Ehud and then Shamgar. Unlike Othniel who is said to have judged Israel (3: 10) Shamgar seems not to have had a period of authority over the people. The deeds of Shamgar, similar to those of Samson, were those of an individual rather than those of a military leader. Verse 6 of chapter 5 mentions Shamgar and the conditions of restricted travel in his day. Perhaps Shamgar's achievement was to free the routes of communication and commerce from the incursions of the Philistines.

Alex Reid

From Derby: We began by considering the Lord, the Judge (ch. 11: 27). The sovereignty of the almighty God is beyond question. The only time 'Judge' is used as a singular word it speaks clearly and plainly of the Lord, the Judge [Comment 5].

God used men and women in a special way "the Spirit of the Lord came

upon him" (3: 10) "clothed itself with" (6: 34 Mg.) "began to move" (13: 25). These people were taken up by God and called judges. They were deliverers or saviours.

We considered that some of them were already walking in God's way; i. e. out of line with the majority, but in line with God. Of others it could well have been said at times, This is not the way, walk not in it'.

The Lord the Judge is demonstrably sovereign over:

- (a) His own people
- (b) The nations. For example Eglon was strengthened against Israel (Ezek. 30: 24).

It is good to remember His sovereignty when talk centres on man's self-destructive ability in the atomic age. God's people forsook the Lord (2: 12), but it would take time for them to become friendly with their enemies, intermarry and serve other gods. A slow, steady drift set in, once they had stopped fighting to keep themselves separate. The result of compromise was and always is totally predictable. They could not any longer stand (2: 14). They were not happy with the results of their new situation (2: 15) for they were sore distressed.

These fighting people stopped fighting and the enemy became their friends. They did not forget their God but took up other gods as well. "The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Ex. 34: 14). He will not be shared or take second place. Nothing God has said has changed. We share Him with 'other gods' at our peril.

"They could not any longer stand" reminds us that we can only stand and withstand when we put on the whole armour of God (Eph. 6: 11). There is a predictable pattern:

Sin (3: 7)

Separation from God, oppression, distress (3: 8)

The next move must always come from men (3: 9)

Eight years passed on this occasion (3: 8). However long a time elapses God cannot and will not move until we cry in repentance.

The Lord raised up a saviour (v. 9). The Lord is full of compassion and gracious (Ps. 86: 15). People in their sin cannot help themselves. When they repent, God forgives and delivers (3: 10) and will bless (Deut. 30: 16).

Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar were men of war. Some were preachers, for we read the people hearkened not to them (2: 17). Chapter 2: 10 and 3: 28-31 speak of victory given by God following His people crying to Him. There is no mention of the price of victory, how many wounded dead, widows and fatherless. There is always a price. "They knew not... " (2: 10). Had

there been a failure to tell what the Lord had done and His commands and promises? Those who take up ministry have a great responsibility to tell "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20: 27).

"The Lord raised up judges..., the Lord was with the judge" (2: 16, 18). The judges began as ordinary people but they were willing to be used by the Lord, and the Lord was with them as long as they were with Him. His promise is clear, "I am with you alway..." (Mat. 28: 20). It is important also to remember the "if's" of Scripture (John 14: 15, 23; John 15: 7, 14).

These people of God soon forgot they had been chosen by the Lord (Deut. 7: 6) "had His love set upon them (v. 7), were redeemed (v. 8) were brought out, and so, separated. They were a people for Him, in a land He would give them, if they took it.

Such were chosen out of the world (Jn. 15: 16) to keep His commandments, abide in His love and go back to the nations with this message (Mat. 28: 20).

S. J. Wymer, G. Conway

From Dulwich: The majesty and glory of Jehovah was seen by Joshua, the elders, and also a generation that followed, but, though they served the Lord, yet there was unbelief, disobedience and idolatry (Judges 2: 1-3). Therefore discipline was exercised by God against them through certain nations, and judges were raised up to enforce the covenant.

Life is not static and so in the process of apostasy we have a generation that knew not God. In what follows we have a pattern of repetition, apostasy, God's anger and judgement, their cry of anguish, and God's compassionate deliverance.

In Israel, judges were appointed according to their tribes (Deut. 16: 18), but those in the book of Judges were men who were raised up by God to deliver Israel from their enemies, and also to administer judgement (Judges 4: 5) [Comment 6].

The period of the rule of Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar together is more than a hundred and twenty years, and during this time the land had rest. This was quite a sizeable part of the four hundred and fifty years stated by Paul in Acts 13: 19-20. If we add the accumulated times of rest, we get a total of two hundred and ninety-nine years (Judges 3: 11, 30; 5: 31; 8: 28; 9: 22; 10: 2, 3; 12: 7, 9, 11, 14; 15: 20; 16: 31). This stands quite in contrast to their servitude of a hundred and eleven years (Judges 3: 8, 14; 4: 3; 6: 1; 10: 8; 13: 1).

If we add a hundred and eleven years to two hundred and ninety-nine we have four hundred and ten, leaving forty years of Paul's statement of four hundred and fifty (years of probable decline in Israel). Then if we add the hundred and eleven to the forty, we have a hundred and fifty one years of shade, compared with two hundred and ninety-nine years of rest, yet the incomparable blot by the tribe of Benjamin at the end of the book of Judges prevents any overall sense of complacency.

From chapter 4: 1, do we gather that Shamgar's period of service was within Ehud's lifetime? [See Question and Answer].

Though the rule of God is not absent in any part of the book of Judges, yet from chapter 17: 6 to the end of the book, a form of anarchy existed (Judges 17: 6; 18: 1; 19: 1; 21: 25) [Comment 7].

The importance and instruction of leadership, and eldership found in 2: 7-10, 18 cannot be exaggerated. Its controlling influence is seen in a generation that knew the Lord, in contrast to one which did not know the Lord.

In our chapter we have a contrast between peoples, kings and judges:

Mesopotamia was the home of a nation far off, and not included in those of Judges 3: 3. Moab was a related race, and the Philistines a cultured group.

Chushan - Rishathaim was a "Nubian of double-dyed wickedness, as it is said his name implies.

Othniel was a man of faith and fearless courage, a strong man.

Ehud was a cunning, but successful strategist.

Shamgar was a man of faith who went from ox-goading to slaughtering the Philistines.

Though we only read of the Spirit coming upon four of the fourteen judges, as we consider Shamgar in his great slaughter of the Philistines, we would conclude that this also was the work of the Spirit.

As Israel were very weak and surrounded by enemies on every side, they had to be taught how to war (Judges 3: 2), and to utilize God's mighty power; to be demonstrated in wars of defence.

W. Town send

From Liverpool: *A Generation Gap:* How sad to read of a generation who neither knew the Lord nor what He had done for Israel. We wondered about this. Were they not taught? Did they refuse to be taught? It is

the responsibility of older ones to pass on the teaching but it is the responsibility of the younger to listen and absorb it.

The Moral Decline: Due to lack of appreciation of God and their covenant relationship to Him and in disobedience to the command of God they saw themselves as part of the world in which they lived and fell in love with the world. The Baals and Ashtoreths - fertile gods - seemed more attractive to them than the Lord who had brought them to the land [Comment 8]. As a direct result

- (i) they incurred the displeasure of God who became
- (ii) actively against them (2: 15). In addition
- (iii) the bond between the tribes, their common worship of the Lord, became weak and the nation was divided and disorganized and
- (iv) because of the hostility of their enemies they were far worse off than the 'strict' worship of God would have been for even the most lukewarm and uncommitted, for they were in great distress.

The Judges: These were not judicial officers but saviours, leaders and heroes. They were raised up because of the constant love of God for His people and were empowered by the Spirit of God. Unfortunately, reform never seems to have outlasted the lifetime of the judge, and the cycle of rebellion, defeat, crying for help, then deliverance continues.

Oppression and Othniel: The raising up of Othniel as the first of the saviours reminds us just how soon after the conquest of Canaan this decline was taking place. Israel was suffering both under the burning anger of the Lord as well as the oppression of Chushan "of the double wickedness". We saw in Othniel a picture of Christ. Othniel was a saviour. He married Achsah, whom some saw as a picture of the Church. Also Othniel brought peace to the land.

Eglon and Ehud' That God used Moab, Ammon and Amalek to punish Israel does not imply approval of those nations who were seen by some as examples of the "will of the flesh" which is unprofitable: Moab and Ammon were the offspring of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters, and Amalek was grandson of the profane Esau. In addition all were blood relations to Israel. To add insult to injury Eglon was in occupation of the Jericho area, symbol of Israel's conquering and entry into the promised land. We noted that this oppression lasted considerably longer than the first eighteen years as against eight and wondered whether it took Israel longer to come to their spiritual senses or whether God's hand was heavier in punishment. Maybe both factors were involved. We took it that 3: 20 indicates that Ehud's act of assassination was from the Lord.

Shammar: Apart from the fact that he seems to have prepared the way for the later deliverances very little is known about Shamgar and we could find no lessons. There is no record of the people doing evil nor a long period of oppression nor of subsequent peace.

D. J. Webster

From **Nottingham**: Verses 6 to 9 serve to act as a contrast to the rest of chapter 2. Different views were expressed as to the reason for the new generation turning from God. The previous generation could be blamed for not teaching the younger generation about God. It could also be said that because those of Joshua's era did not totally drive out those in occupation of the promised land, as God commanded, then they were responsible for leaving the source of the temptation which resulted in the new generation's sinfulness. The younger generation, however, may have rejected the teaching of their elders or may have been apathetic towards God.

The second half of chapter 2 gives an outline of how the system of the judges worked, how that God, in His mercy would raise up a judge who would save them from the hands of their enemies. This continued, even though, the people became most sinful after a judge had died. The judge did not leave an impact which attended the ways of the people to such an extent that after his death they kept on serving God.

In chapter 3 it was noted that, although Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar were judges there is no reference as to how they ruled, with the emphasis being on how they drove out the enemy.

Ehud shows how severely the flesh should be dealt with. The two-edged sword used can be compared **with** the word of God (Heb. 4: 12). Shamgar shows that an unlikely weapon can be used by God to great effect.

D. W. Thompson

From **Wishaw**: The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua. Yet after his death "there arose another generation... which knew not the Lord". This seemed to be the trend during the days of the judges; after the death of a good leader they returned to sinful ways, serving Baal and the

Ashtaroth and forsaking God. Nevertheless, in spite of their sin, God appointed judges who would lead them in a straight path, and deliver them from their enemies.

Vv. 22, 23 highlight the purpose behind the trials the people found themselves being brought into, that purpose being the proving of the people, and the showing of the grace and kindness of God. He could have cut them off, but instead gave them time and again the opportunity of returning to their God. Through their trials they were caused to remember the 'old' ways, and thus be proved (cf. Deut. 8: 2). Even among God's people today there are many trials which may be sent to try us. This portion suggests that the punishment God gave them was His action in *not* driving out the nations; but these nations would serve as thorns in their sides. Israel was to suffer from the inhabitants of the land which they had failed to drive out. Some of these nations dwelt in mount Baal-Hermon. Hermon was in north-east Palestine, and means a place of blessing; but here it is coupled with Baal! Perhaps the 'people of blessing' were coupled with the sinful nations. History tells of 'an unholy alliance'. Surely this was one tool. This lack of separation led also to God's people intermarrying with the daughters of the nations, causing them to lose their identity as a people that dwell alone.

The Lord raised up a deliverer for His people in the form of Othniel, the nephew of Caleb. His name suggests the meaning of 'a force for God'. It may be that the godly influence of his uncle and perhaps also Joshua gave rise to a strong character who was guided by the Spirit of the Lord to give Israel rest for forty years. Othniel demonstrates how influential a young man, led by God's Spirit, can be among the people of God [Comment 9].

In 3: 12 Israel again returned to evil. This time their punishment was in the person of Eglon, king of Moab. The people cried to their God, and Ehud was raised up. He killed Eglon and the land had rest for eighty years. We wondered why God appointed Eglon to punish Israel, and then allowed Ehud to kill him? Did Eglon go beyond what was reasonable? It was suggested that the sovereignty of God had a bearing on this matter [Comment 10].

Finally, in the portion God raised up Shamgar, son of Anath. He was to keep Israel carefully (as seems suggested in his name) and deliver them from the Philistines. It is interesting to note his father's name seems to mean 'an answer'. He may well have been pleading for a saviour, and the answer was provided in the person of his own son. We too should be praying that God will give us men who will wisely lead His people today.

M. D. *Bentham, M. D. Macdonald*

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead): Friends in Birkenhead are right to draw attention to this matter because its premier importance may be seen in it being the first issue over which the Lord punished His people in the Land. We must all notice how this was connected with their failure to maintain their separated position (3: 6-7) especially in marrying outside the people of God. The association of this first subjugation with Mesopotamia is absolutely consistent with this lapse because it brings Babylon immediately to mind. Beginning from the days of Abraham, continuing in the Days of the Judges and no less in our day, the temptation to serve God outside the house of God is always present to the people of God. One day it will be seen in all its horror in the great harlot (Rev. 17: 1-2). We would rather say, however, that spiritual fornication is but a milestone on the road to apostasy and may begin in our day, as it did in the days of the Judges, and the apostles with "the friendship of the world" (Jas. 4: 4).

2. (Birkenhead and Birmingham): Yes, this is one of the great things about the Judges. They were usually of lowly estate or with some natural handicap and often, humanly speaking, the least likely people. So it was with David and David's Greater Son. We may take great encouragement from this in our day as we view the repeated application of the principles of 1 Cor. 1: 26 and Zech. 4: 6.

I. E. P.

3. (Birkenhead): What happened locally did have its effect on the nation, in that through those judges God saved Israel (2: 18; 3: 31).

E. A.

4. (Birmingham): 'Murrain' is the Hebrew word *deber* which is different from *debir* which indicates speech and speaking. In Josh. 10: 38 *Debir* is captured after Hebron indicating, we suggest, that the believer's speech should follow and be the product of his fellowship with God. Similarly, the change of name in Judges 3 is indicative, surely, of the need of the believer to replace the wisdom of this world with words learned from the Lord and invites comparison with Acts 19: 19-20.

5. (Derby): What about Judges 2: 18?

6. (Dulwich): 1 Sam. 8: 10-22 is very helpful in showing the difference between the rule of the kings and the days of the Judges. As friends in Dulwich say, the judges were outside the legal system. What they judged was the mind of the Lord in relation to the behaviour of the people. Immediately the people were saved from the consequences of their sin, they needed to be continually judged so that they could hold on to what they had won. In the career of the judges we see something of the One who is first our Saviour who shed His blood to purchase churches of God and who now walks as Judge in the midst of these churches (Rev. 1: 13-18). There is a day to come when His judgement will be formal and legal but today such judgement within the churches of God are the responsibility of saints in their divinely ordered capacities. What they do is to be in the light of the mind of the Lord which the Lord has enshrined in the faith, once for all delivered to the saints.

7. (Dulwich): This point is most effectively made if we remember that the later part of the book of Judges took place during the times of the earlier part.

8. (Liverpool): It would appear from 1 Kings 11: 5 that Ashtoreth is singular and Ashtaroth (Judges 2: 13) is singular.

9. (Wishaw): Caleb and Joshua were the only survivors of the generation that left Egypt. Othniel therefore, belonged to the next generation which captured the land and were faithful to the Lord (Jud. 2: 7). The generation after that, i. e. the third generation, failed (Jud. 2: 10) and Othniel was raised up to save them. Therefore we can hardly say that Othniel was a young man but rather that he was a giant from a preceding generation.

10. (Wishaw): Yes, this is one of the great themes of the Scriptures which we touched on in our studies in Rom. 9.

LE. P.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

From Bolton and Leigh: Did the rule of each judge follow in order of succession, or did some of their periods of rule overlap?

The order given in Judges is intended to be chronological since the words "after him" appear frequently (e. g. 10: 1, 3; 12: 7, 8, 11, 13).

Regarding 4: 1, where Shamgar's death is not mentioned, it may be that Ehud's death was of more far-reaching significance for Israel as a whole, if the matter can be related to the length of narrative devoted to each character respectively. Even so, many accept that there was possibly a measure of overlap among judges who were contemporaries (see the Chronology in the English Version of the Polyglot Bible, p. 194, Bagster, London).

Judges 4: 1 places Ehud's death prior to the defeat of Sisera and Jabin, but there is no indication from the order of verses 3: 31 and 4: 1 that the beginning of Shamgar's rule came after the death of Ehud. Therefore we might either assume that one who had been raised up to be a judge did not necessarily rule for the rest of his lifetime (but the instance of Joshua does not suggest this), or that judges could be ruling simultaneously, and, as a corollary of this, the period of rest could overlap substantially with the rule of a judge or judges (see Aberdeen paper).

E. A.

Friends in Dulwich correctly add up the periods given in Judges and when we add the forty years of Eli's judgeship (1 Sam. 4: 18) we arrive at the 450 years mentioned in Acts 13: 19-20. From this we would conclude that we are to consider the periods mentioned in Judges as being consecutive. Solomon, however, began to build the temple 480 years after the Exodus (1 Kings 6: 1) which includes the period of the judges as well as the 40 years in the wilderness, the unknown periods of capture of the land, the rule of Saul, the inter-regnum of Samuel and the 40 years of David and 3-4 of Solomon. This is considerably more than 450 years.

In addition, from the period immediately before the entry to the land to Jephthah's day is 300 years (Jud. 11: 26); yet Jephthah comes on the scene more than 320 years after the beginning of the judges. Clearly something other than mere "telling the time" is intended by these figures. It is often said that the Lord ignores the barren years but does the sum of these tally?

J F P

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8803

LEAD THY CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE

The children of Israel experienced twenty years of mighty oppression at the hands of Jabin, king of Canaan, years which bore witness to previous failure in their responsibility to heed the commandments of the Lord (Ex. 20: 3; Judges 5: 8). In their affliction they cried to the Lord and He heard the cry of His oppressed people.

Joshua had told the house of Joseph, "But the hill country shall be thine... and the goings out thereof... for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they be strong" (Josh. 17: 18). In that same hill country lived Deborah, a woman for whom the commandments of the Lord meant more than the fear of Sisera's chariots. Through Deborah Barak received the assurance, "I will deliver him into thine hand". Although faced with the proving of things not seen, Barak rallied faithful Israelites and by divine enabling used the sword effectively in the battle with the Canaanites (5: 19; Heb. 11: 1, 32, 33). His refusal to go without Deborah cost him the additional honour of destroying the enemy captain, which in an unexpected way fell to a woman as Deborah had foretold.

At that time the faith of many in Israel was tested. Reuben's resolves and searchings of heart while waiting to see how the outcome of battle would affect his own concerns, and Dan's tarrying in ships in the hour of danger, stood in sharp contrast to the spirited involvement of Zebulun and all who were like-minded, "a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death" (5: 18).

Regarding this latter description we find that the apostles and elders similarly characterized Barnabas and Paul as, "Men that have

hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15: 26). Also in turn Paul wrote of Prisca and Aquila saying, "Who for my life laid down their own necks". These fought the good fight of the faith.

Hardiness and human bravery alone could effect little, but faith introduced a totally different dimension. The kings of Canaan at the river Kishon even as the might of Egypt at the Red Sea, encountered a force beyond their reckoning as the Lord discomfited Sisera and all his chariots and all his host (4: 15). Sisera's chariot, which his mother awaited impatiently, was abandoned, as he "fled away on his feet". Israel's help came from the Lord who made heaven and earth (see Ps. 121: 12), and this is not always appreciated nor indeed admitted by those who seek to rationalize these events.

The curse upon the city of Meroz for seeing the plight of Israel and doing nothing to help, sets the actions of Jael in their true light. She came to the help of the Lord's people by risking her own life. Sisera sought to put deceitful words into the mouth of Jael, which, had he escaped thereby, could have proved as damaging as the sharp arrows of the mighty (Ps. 120: 4). In the matter of the Lord's dealings with **the** human heart none could remain neutral, and choices and aspirations are revealed all through the narrative together with their outcomes.

Success, victory, and increasing strength for the Lord's people resulted from love for Him and that faith whereby they offered themselves willingly at His commands. It was when they began to choose other gods that disaster and oppression made inroads. In particular, the period when the land had rest was one of testing for the Lord's people, when crucial values had to be held on to unimpaired.

E. A.

DEBORAH AND BARAK (Judges 4: 1-5: 31)

From Aberdeen: God was by no means hesitant in His judgement of Israel for the evil they did after Ehud died. In a strongly worded account of God's dealings with them we find that "the Lord sold them". Israelites were missing completely the favour of God during these twenty years in which Jabin mightily oppressed them.

Deborah the prophetess judged Israel. Evidently no man was fit for this work at that time. However, Deborah worked away as a

mother in Israel. Hear the mother's voice speaking to Barak the son of Abinoam, "Hath not the Lord the God of Israel, commanded, saying, 'Go... ' "? Deborah's whole purpose and mission was to secure a willingness and capability in the men of Israel to take the lead. This is made clear in her song: "My heart is toward the governors of Israel... " (Judges 5: 9). Also, her support for Barak is evident: "Arise, Barak, and lead... " (Judges 5: 12).

Who are the leaders mentioned in verse 2 of the song of Deborah and Barak? The song identifies the nobles of Ephraim, the governors of Machir (who was the son of Manasseh), the handlers of the marshal's staff of Zebulun and the princes of Issachar (Judges 5: 13-15). Some there were who stayed at home and missed a glorious victory. Barak also missed out on a special honour. Twenty years of mighty oppression by Jabin seem to have left Barak short of assurance to step out at the head of Israel in singular leadership. He wanted Deborah the prophetess to step out with him. So the outcome of this chapter in Israel's history was that God "sold" Sisera into the hand of a woman. God had "sold" Israel into the hand of Jabin — unmistakable correction. Now God sells Sisera into the hand of a woman, unmistakable reproof for Barak. In these two matters where God 'sells', do we not see God's perfectly weighted justice in the big things, and in the smaller things, of men's walk before Him? Jael took the honour that day for her part in destroying the Lord's enemies. It was not a case of Jael's murdering Sisera: it was a woman on the Lord's side helping to fight the Lord's battle. She is commended in the poetry of the song:

"Blessed above women shall Jael be,
The wife of Heber the Kenite,
Blessed shall she be above women in the tent".

Jael's act closed a chapter of fierce oppression against Israel. Though she was not an Israelite herself, she is commended as one who loved the Lord, because she sided with the Lord's people.

James Johnson

From **Birkenhead**: Deborah was a prophetess who appears in the list of judges of Israel. She had her headquarters "under the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel, in the hill country of Ephraim" (Judges 4: 5). She was consulted there by the Israelites from various tribes who wished to have their disputes settled.

During her period of judicial responsibility, however, Israel fell into idolatry once more. Disobedience led to oppression, this time from Jabin, king of Hazor. Hazor, some seven miles north of Lake Galilee, had been destroyed by Joshua's forces, but it seems that the city had been reoccupied soon afterwards.

Jabin had a mighty force of iron chariots at his disposal, commanded by his general, Sisera. Israel, on the other hand, was in a disarmed, downtrodden state. Judges 5: 6 outlines the situation that obtained in the land. Travellers had abandoned the major trade routes and were making their journeys through winding paths. Two views about this were proposed: firstly, that it was a course of action necessary because with enemy occupation travel would need to be planned to avoid interception; secondly, that the R. V. marginal reading 'crooked ways' gives us a picture of the crookedness of the heart, as the people no longer walked in straight paths before the Lord [Comment 1].

Israel's plight led them to seek refuge in Jehovah; God had used Jabin to lead Israel to repentance. Deborah, the only woman in the distinguished company of the judges, emerged as the saviour of her people. Deborah commanded Barak to take the field as the Israelite commander-in-chief, and consented to accompany him at his insistence.

Barak played a secondary part to this great and gifted woman [Comment 2], and drew inspiration and courage from her presence. His lack of faith was to result in victory going to a woman, a slight that was hard to bear among Hebrew men. In spite of this, it is Barak, not Deborah, who is mentioned in the catalogue of faith in Hebrews 11.

Barak summoned the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali to military action, against the Canaanites. It seems that the challenge was extended to other tribes, however, since some were later condemned for their inactivity. A force of ten thousand men gathered on Mount Tabor, a hill which lies to the north of the valley of Jezreel. The rocky terrain was inaccessible to the chariots and, at the time of God's choice, the army was able to sweep down and attack.

In human terms, Israel was faced with significant odds. God fought for His people, however, and thus a decisive victory was procured. The language of Judges 5: 4, 5, 20, 21 suggests that a violent storm occurred which resulted in flooding and caused the chariots to be bogged down and immobilized [Comment 3]. God is omnipotent, and He can never fail. Those who war against Him will always fail. We should never trust in human power, but in God alone.

Sisera fled on foot and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. She was no friend of his, however, and killed him in his sleep with a tent peg through his temple. Moses had married a Kenite woman, Zipporah, which may explain this kinship between the Kenites and the Israelites (see Judges 1: 16).

In chapter 5 there follows the song of Deborah and Barak, which is a poetic account of the events. The victory is also commemorated in

song by Asaph (Ps. 83: 9, 10). The key to victory is found to be the willingness of the people in serving God. All glory and praise for deliverance is given to God; we too should remember our deliverance and give praise to Him (Is. 51: 1).

G. H Roberts, J. D. Williams

From **Birmingham**: God in His sovereignty raised up two women to fulfil His purposes, Deborah, who judged Israel and Jael the wife of Heber who destroyed Sisera, the enemy of the people. Jael completed the job and received the honour that should have fallen to the reluctant Barak, who would only go against the enemy if Deborah was with him (v. 8). The honour would therefore not be his (v.9).

Deborah dwelt deep in Israelite territory between Ramah and Bethel. The invasion from Sisera came well to the north, affecting the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali. Ehud's deliverance of Israel from the Moabites affected Jericho much further to the south and his influence had seemingly not been so great with these northern tribes, who in their complacency allowed the once conquered and destroyed city of Hazor (see Josh. 11: 10-13) to be rebuilt on their own doorstep and be the source of their twenty-year oppression. Jabin is the case of the old enemy revived (see Josh. 11: 1).

Deborah's appointment as judge was contrary to God's ordinary dealings and a reflection on men [Comment 5]. She was, however, in noway a lesser judge and had that spiritual strength and astuteness to rally the people to the command of God (vv. 4, 16). An army of 10,000 men was assembled at Kedesh Naphtali and commanded to "draw unto Mount Tabor". This entailed marching south past Hazor the stronghold of Jabin. Other tribes supported them (5: 14, 15). The River Kishon, some distance from Mount Tabor, was the place to which God would draw (Heb. pull, (drag)Sisera.

Victory was assured, but Barak wavered even under the faith and assurance of Deborah. His faith was weak and he lacked obedience insisting that Deborah accompany him (4: 8) [Comment 4]. To his credit he did not waver when God through Deborah commanded the attack. The Israelites swept down from Mount Tabor into the valley and the enemy was routed and destroyed. Not a man was left. From the song we learn what brought about Sisera's defeat: a cloud-burst flooded the watercourse of Kishon and swept away the Canaanite chariotry (v.21), throwing the army into confusion and making it an easy prey for Barak's men.

We have not the immediate destruction of the enemy under king Jabin. It says in 4: 23 "So God subdued *on that day* Jabin". There needs to be daily victory over the enemy. Also in 4: 24 "the hand of the children of Israel prevailed more and more against Jabin... until they had

destroyed Jabin. This may be the same in our own experience against certain temptations. Deborah's name carries the thought of orderliness, like the bee with its orderly behaviour patterns. So through the process of order and the discipline of the people in war they recovered themselves from the state of moral weakness into which they had fallen. They began with small things and little by little the enemy was overcome. "The fruit of the Spirit is... self-control" (Gal. 5: 22, 23 RVM) through which godliness comes (2 Pet. 2: 6). Its absence in fulfilling whatever whim and fancy we may have has the most disastrous of consequences. We have in those latter verses of Romans 1 the state of men and women who have cast off all restraint. It is that lascivious work of the flesh to which naturally we all incline and which is overcome in the lesson from Deborah; the systematic application of an ordered self-controlled and disciplined life.

The Lord Jesus exhorts us to deny ourselves. Peter also in his epistle writes "be ye therefore sober (i. e. to abstain, be of sound mind), and watch" (1 Pet. 4: 7, AV) and "Be sober (i. e. circumspect, self-controlled), be watchful: your adversary... as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5: 8).

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: The book of Judges is particularly outstanding in giving us both examples and warnings. There had been at least 80 years of peace after Moab was subdued by God through Ehud (3: 30).

Chapter 4 opens on the sad note that the people of Israel were again doing evil, and as a result, God allowed Jabin, king of Canaan to oppress them for 20 years. The song of Deborah and Barak is one of the early parts of Scripture, written before the main part of the narrative, and would be in possession of the writer of the Book of Judges.

"The rulers ceased in Israel" (5: 7), and God used two women to bring about deliverance (Deborah and Jael). Deborah was raised up by the Lord as a judge in Israel. She dwelt near "the palm tree", and in those parts of the land, palm trees were scarce, so this would be a landmark. Deborah was a prophetess and other examples can be found in Scripture (Miriam, Anna) showing the office of prophesying was not limited to males. This does not give sanction for women to prophesy in the churches of God today. Apart from the briefest of statements, Lappidoth, as the husband of Deborah, is not mentioned again. He can be seen as a meek man, content to allow his wife to have the glory, but not a weak man. He was meek as was Moses and indeed the Lord Himself, who prevailed to enter the "strong man's domain" (Mat. 12: 29; 1 John 3: 8 with Heb. 2: 14, 15; Col. 2: 15; Eph.

2: 15, 16; 2 Tim. 1: 10) to bring to nought him that had the power of death. Deborah did not overstep her responsibility, but called for Barak. She recognised that it was not her role to lead in battle. It was suggested that Barak was perhaps much younger than Deborah (a mother in Israel) and God revealed to her the talent and potential of young Barak. Is there a lack of mothers in Israel today? Very often older sisters have recognised potential in younger brethren before they themselves have. Indeed younger brethren have been frequently encouraged and nurtured by these older sisters.

Barak responded to the call of God through Deborah. His determination that Deborah must go with him was not through lack of courage or faith, but rather a lack of experience. He wanted to be sure that it was God's will and not man's to go into battle [Comment 6]. Similar words were used by Gideon (as we shall see in a later paper) and by Moses after the incident of the golden calf, when Moses said to the Lord, "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence (Ex. 33: 15).

Deborah stirred up and inspired the leaders to trust in God and go forward into battle (5: 1-9). Some doubt was expressed as to whether all the tribes were called or whether only the northern tribes were involved. Not all the tribes are mentioned, but Ephraim, Benjamin, Issachar and Zebulun did respond as also did Machir. Some tribes gave a negative response; Asher and Reuben sat still, Dan remained in ships, Gilead (Gad) "abode beyond Jordan" and Meroz did not come "to the help of the Lord", and the angel of the Lord said, "curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof" (v. 23). Is there a lesson here for us today if we refuse to make ourselves available to the call of the Master? Paul said "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ" (2 Cor. 5: 20).

Barak went into battle against Sisera with an untrained army of ten thousand men, governors, nobles, lawgivers and scribes, and with very few weapons of war, but with God on his side. Sisera had nine hundred chariots of iron and an estimated one hundred thousand men. The chariots were rendered useless as the river Kishon flooded with heavy rain, a similar situation to the armies of Pharaoh as they followed the children of Israel into the Red Sea, where the chariots became stuck. God had intervened mid wrought the victory for Israel.

The honour, however, was not Barak's (4: 9). Sisera tried to escape on foot and fled as far as the tent of Heber the Kenite. Despite being well treated (asking for water and being given milk and butter), Sisera expected Jael (wife of Heber) to be deceitful and

tell a lie should any inquire (4: 20). Divinely guided, Jael used the instruments or weapons she had, a tent pin and a hammer, and drove the tent-pin through his temples into the ground. Sisera would already be tired after a day's fighting and escaping for his life. There was a feeling, however, that God caused him to fall into a deep sleep.

It was suggested that of the pairs in Heb. 11: 32, the former had the greater faith. Deborah is not mentioned by name in this roll of honour of faith, although perhaps she could be implied in vv. 33 and 34. Is there a reason for this omission [Comment 7]?

A lesson that can be drawn for us is that we should use whatever talent or gift, however small in our sight, for God's glory and honour. No matter what the obstacle or challenge, God will give the victory.

W. Paterson, Jnr.

From **Dulwich**: How can we account for Israel's rebellion to do evil in the sight of the Lord, after having suffered twenty-six years of cruel servitude. This lapse brought them into the longest period of oppression.

In the fabric of the book of Judges we see the rule and judgement of God in two spheres, the kingdom of God, and the rule of the heavens. In the kingdom of God, He had the right to sell them into the hand of Jabin; in the rule of the heavens, He had the right to sell Sisera and his host into the hand of Barak.

Jabin, ('intelligence' - Dr. Young) was wise enough to remove shield and spear from Israel (Judges 5: 8), and was quite confident to remain at a distance in Hazor and leave the battle to Sisera.

As there were many kings in Canaan (Judges 5: 19), would Jabin be a king of kings? He certainly was a formidable opponent with his armoured brigade of nine hundred chariots of iron, and mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

As the battle against Sisera was located at the river Kishon in the plain of Megiddo, would this military array be a shadow of the great conflict to come [Comment 8].

Would it be correct to assume that because of the formative stage in Israel's history a weakness existed in the matter of rule and leadership [Comment 9], and because of this, this great woman Deborah was raised up to be a judge and prophetess (Judges 1: 2, 4: 8, 9; 5: 7 R. V.)? Added to this there seemed to be a lack of national unity (Judges 5: 15-17). Sectional self-interest would fail to enter into the blessings contained in their national heritage.

Doubtless Deborah was within the circle of godly women referred to in 1 Pet. 3: 1-6. This would show in relief the character of Lappidoth (lights), one who would be able to instruct her in the law of Jehovah. The expression "mother in Israel" is interesting as we have no evidence that she had a family. Does it imply the loving tender care that God had for His people, of which Deborah was a channel? The extent of Deborah's office and influence was national (Judges 4: 4), yet there is no mention of some of the tribes, notably Judah.

On the military side, Barak had the responsibility of carrying out God's judgement against Sisera. Previously he had been sent on foot to Reuben (Judges 5: 15) [Comment 10]. Though he seemed to lack confidence to necessitate Deborah's presence with him, yet he executed God's judgement. It would seem from Judges 5: 12 that Barak released prisoners and led captivity captive. There is a reference to this in Eph. 4: 8 concerning the Lord's ascending, leading captivity captive.

The song of praise by Deborah is to Jehovah, who in His sovereign rule, commands the stars of the heavens in their courses (Judges 5: 20), the rain (v. 4), the river Kishon (v. 21), to defeat the mighty (v. 23).

The expression "they came not to the help of the Lord" of 5: 23, would suggest how fully the Lord was identified with Israel in the battle. Though others had failed to help, it would seem that the guilt of Meroz was more serious. In contrast the peculiar bias of Jael on Israel's behalf, brought forth the blessing of Deborah.

W. Townsend

From Liverpool: *The Oppression of Jabin:* God's people during this period seemed to have learned nothing from the troubles previously brought on them as a result of their wrong-doing and once again they did evil in the eyes of the Lord. This time they were cruelly oppressed for 20 years accompanied by social breakdown with roads abandoned and village life at an end, so that they were reduced to a pitiful state. In fact, God was actively against His people, having sold them, emphasizing the Master/Servant relationship against which they had rebelled. Eventually the people cried to the Lord for help; but for the wrong reason. It was not in a spirit of repentance that they did, but as a last resort. Still, God in His mercy listened to them and provided a way out.

Deborah - A Mother in Israel: Unique **in the Scriptures as the** only woman raised up by God to exercise civil government, Deborah as a mother guided and nurtured the people with care and concern and she was used by God to send for Barak to raise an army and gain the victory over Sisera and his troops.

Barak - The Man: Certainly not without faith (cf. Heb. 11: 32-33), not fearful, Barak comes across as an honest man who knew his own limitations, rather than a man of indecision as some think, since he responded without hesitation to Deborah's summons. Perhaps he needed to learn, as do so many of us today, that when the Lord gives an instruction He gives us the strength to carry it out. In the culture of that day it was considered a shameful thing for a fighting man to be slain by a woman, and the "honour" for the destruction of the enemy commander would fall to another woman as God further prepared the way for His people's deliverance.

Barak - The Victory: it would appear that the Lord sent a flash flood and sudden downpour to turn the dry valley into a muddy bog taking the advantage from Sisera's iron chariots and giving it to the Israelites. The very chariots in which Sisera's hope and trust centred became his great liability. Faith and tactics are in partnership when we allow God to direct us and obey even when we cannot see the 'how'.

The Death of Sisera: What is presented as cold blooded murder in 4: 21 is seen in a different light in the inspired poem (5: 24-27) in which Jael is described as "Blessed above women"; and we took it from this that she was acting in accordance with God's will. There had been no score to settle for friendly relations had existed between them.

Those who love the Lord are likened to the sun from which we derive warmth, light and all the benefits such as food, beauty and colour, and life itself. The application is obvious if we take up the challenge.

D. J. Webster

From Wishaw: The meaning of this particular woman's name Deborah (a bee) seems to be in keeping with her character of a caring and industrious woman. She appears to have been raised by the Lord for a particular work for a particular time. It was generally felt that there were leaders in Israel at this time; but they had failed to rise to their responsibilities, so the Lord used this remarkable woman.

It states in v. 4 that Deborah "judged Israel" at that time. This shows in a measure the calibre of this "mother in Israel". She would listen to a matter, consider the implications, and then give a reasoned judgement as to what was best to do. Deborah seems to have judged Israel for forty years, probably during Jabin's twenty years of oppression, and in the subsequent years. It says Israel "came up" to Deborah for judgement. It seems the people were the better of having been with her.

The Lord seems to have instructed this woman in some way to send for Barak in connection with the overthrow of Sisera. He willingly came

the long distance from the north at her request. It may be that Deborah realised that it was not her place to lead the army against Sisera's host, although she had done valiantly in judging Israel. Deborah wisely informed Barak that Sisera would fall by the hand of a woman, and that the glory of the day would not fall to Barak; but still he was willing to go.

Deborah was one to inspire confidence in others. Barak felt the urgent need of such a woman to be by his side at this crucial engagement. To his request Deborah replied, "I will surely go with thee". Here we have a reflection of the heart of the God of this "mother in Israel".

Deborah's song appears to be a spontaneous outburst of praise to God following the decisive victory by the men of Zebulun and Naphtali over Sisera's host. This woman seemed to have an overall picture of the state of affairs in Israel, and could comment accordingly. There was the unexpected help from some tribes e. g. Benjamin, Ephraim and Issachar. There was also the disappointment from others e. g. Dan, Asher and specially Reuben. It says of Reuben that "there were great resolves of heart"; but no action followed this searching of heart. Reuben was characteristically unstable. Deborah wisely commended those who deserved commendation and equally wisely reproved others who deserved reproof.

Finally, Deborah gives to Jael, the second woman in the story, high commendation for the part she played in the overthrow of Sisera [Comment 11]. The song finishes in a way that typifies the final manner in which the Lord Jesus will triumph over all His enemies.

M. D. Macdonald, R. Ure

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead): If the condition of the Lord's people was not what it could be, it would hardly be surprising to find a restriction of weapons and curtailment of movement being imposed by an occupying enemy. The majesty of God at Sinai and His mighty works against Sihon and Og stand in contrast to the circumstances described in Judges 5: 6. Two words in Hebrew are translated by the one English word "byways", and the word which means 'crooked' appears also in Ps. 125: 5.

Nevertheless those suffering tribulation are not always themselves to blame, and it is the context of a word which helps to determine its meaning in a particular verse.

2. (Birkenhead): In the record of events given in chapter 4 it is noteworthy that Deborah in her communications with Barak gave prominence to the commands of the Lord (4: 6) and to His leading (4: 14), and regarded the part Barak had to play as an important one in the Lord's purpose.

3. (Birkenhead): This could not have been permanent immobilisation of all the chariots, for we read that "Barak pursued after the chariots and after the host unto Harosheth of the Gentiles" (4: 16). Nevertheless the advantage of the chariots was lost from this point.

4. (Birmingham): If Deborah had refused to go with Barak, and he had kept his word, he would have disobeyed the commandment of the Lord. As it was she did not refuse to do so, and this saved him from disobedience. Moreover his faith is cited as an example in Heb. 11: 32. However Deborah's utterance that the journey as he chose it would not be for Barak's honour, and that the Lord would sell Sisera into the hand of a woman proved to be prophetic. Faith is positively assessed, and the limitations can be of one's own making, if one only knew it.

5. (Birmingham): Men versed in the law and disciplined in the application of it appear to have been lacking. Several features of the days of the Judges were anomalous. Instead of speaking to Eli the Lord spoke to a child. We know the reason for this. As for Deborah judging Israel, the lamentable fact had been that "The rulers ceased in Israel". Inferences can also be drawn for instance from the uniqueness of the example of Deborah, the significant references to Sisera's being sold into the hand of a woman, and the fact that the hammer used by Jael was a workman's hammer.

6. (Bolton and Leigh): It is difficult to know how Deborah's presence at the battle would make him more certain that it was God's will, after the words, "Hath not the Lord, the God of Israel commanded saying, Go and draw unto mount Tabor..."?

7. (Bolton and Leigh): Might one suggest that the prophetesses are implied along with the prophets?

8. (Dulwich): The honour in the great conflict to come will belong to the Lord Himself. The setting of the battle with the Canaanites and the final words of the victory song would be applicable also to that great victory. If the head of the Canaanite camp was in Taanach and it stretched down to the waters of Megiddo, the Canaanite hosts were sizeable, but the battle of that day will be mighty by comparison.

9. (Dulwich): A weakness it appears to be, but whether this could be excused on the grounds that the nation was at a formative stage is another matter. When Joshua chose his own portion he selected a place in the hill country of Ephraim.

10. (Dulwich): "They rushed forth at his feet" would refer to the host rushing into the valley under the command of Barak.

11. (Wishaw): Sisera deliberately sought the tent of Jael, which is explained by the peace existing between Heber the Kenite and Jabin. She is not described as Jael the Kenite. She went out to meet Sisera. It was not the pursuers he had to fear. The rug would hide him. The dish was for distinguished visitors. The skin of milk would assist sleep. The rug was replaced and she went about her deadly work undetected. It would be ironical if the nail was of the same substance as the chariots. Her heart was with the Lord's people, and her deed was one of war.

E. A.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8804

IF I TELL OF GIDEON

Full of compassion and gracious, the Lord apprehended Gideon amid the life to which the children of Israel were reduced because of their evil ways. Surrounded on every side by the threat of the enemy, his heart struggled to reconcile the oppression under which his nation laboured with the glory of those mighty acts of God whereby He had delivered their fathers from the yoke of Egypt. The prophet of the Lord had told them plainly that they were experiencing the effects of their idolatry, yet his own father had an altar of Baal. Surely this was a vain manner of life, since Baal was powerless to deliver?

The precious seed was being devoured by invaders, numerous and destructive as locusts, before it could come to fruition. Notable among these children of the East were the Midianites. The merchantmen who sold Joseph into Egypt in his tender years were Midianites. The name signifies 'contentions' (Prov. 18: 18).

Poorest and least by his own estimation, Gideon was the one who saw the angel of the Lord sitting there in Ophrah, and the angel called him a "mighty man of valour". The Lord Himself looked upon him, the Lord, who would again cause His face to shine upon His people, and Gideon in his alarm at having seen the Lord's angel received the assurance, "Peace be unto thee". Therefore he acknowledged that the Lord is Peace.

From this beginning the commandment of the Lord was heeded, although for Gideon it meant ultimate confrontation with the men of the city and of his own household. His testimony however was unmistakable. Forgetting and accounting as of no value what he was forsaking, he had made a clean break with Baal-worship, and the people were persuaded to await the evidence of Baal's retribution.

But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. The Midianites were so numerous, yet the Lord had said, "thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man". Not only were the princes slain, but also the kings. Truly "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 1 4: 6).

This deliverance by the Lord is picked out in the book of Habakkuk along with the deliverance from the king of Aram as an early instance of the Lord's power manifested on behalf of His people (Hab. 3: 7), and Habakkuk was enabled to rise above all circumstances and exclaim "I will joy in the God of my salvation".

Fear on the part of Midian is likened to the trembling of curtains. The Midianites trembled as those who fear God's judgement, being in open opposition to His counsel. A different trembling is regarded by the Lord: "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word" (Is. 66: 2). It is amid hearts yielding to the Spirit that the Lord can find a dwelling or Sanctuary, even as Isaiah could say, "The Lord of hosts, Him shall ye sanctify; and let Him be your fear" (Is. 8: 10, 13).

In Isaiah 10: 26 the prophet speaks beforehand of the defeat of Sennacherib as the result of a scourge which the Lord would stir up against the Assyrian, and he likens it to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb. Then the gloom of darkness would give place to light and joy as of harvest, when the power of the oppressor was broken (Is. 9: 4). The yoke of the oppressor would be destroyed because of the anointing (Is. 10: 27). This thought leads on to the One on whom the Spirit of the Lord can rest, namely the Prince of Peace, Immanuel.

E. A.

GIDEON (Judges 6: 1 - 8: 35)

From Aberdeen: In the case of Gideon we can see the strength of God made perfect in weakness. Gideon was very hesitant about God's call and commission. Firstly, his reaction to the angel of the Lord is markedly lacking in self-confidence. To counter Gideon's dismay at "all this" which had befallen Israel the angel of the Lord "turned towards him" (RVM), and said, "Go in this thy might... have not I sent thee"? Gideon's awareness of weakness is evident in his second objection, "O Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel"? Notice that the Lord (Jehovah) counters this lack of confidence, saying, "Surely I will be with thee".

Gideon's hesitancy then manifests itself in his asking for a sign to confirm the fact that God is actually talking with him, (Judg. 6: 17). The angel of God obliges by touching Gideon's present (offering) with the end of his staff; thus causing fire from the rock to consume it. God tells Gideon to get rid of the idol and altar belonging to his father, and because he is afraid of his fellow townsmen he does the job by night. Nevertheless he "did as the Lord had spoken unto him".

The Spirit of the Lord "clothed itself with" Gideon (RVM) and in divine strength he blew the trumpet to rally the men of Israel. Even so,

Gideon still shows hesitancy; not in the sense of a disobedient attitude, but in the sense of wanting to be sure of God's call. So Gideon puts out his fleece and asks for unusual results twice over. God in perfect knowledge of Gideon answers to allay his fears.

Finally with just three hundred men Gideon is standing in faith ready to fight at God's bidding. God issues the battle orders and makes it clear that the camp of Midian has been delivered into Gideon's hand. What follows is a remarkable incident which shows God dealing in a sympathetic way with Gideon's fear, "But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Purah thy servant down to the camp... and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down into the camp" (Judges 7: 11). Indeed, after hearing the dream interpreted Gideon never looked back. Gideon seems to be a real 'warrior', as his name suggests, from this point on. His handling of the men of Ephraim - cooling their anger; his reproof to the men of Succoth and Penuel; and his bearing towards the two kings of Midian at the time he slew them are evidence of the strength which God had given Gideon. It is true to say that Gideon was one of those who "from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens" (Heb. 11: 34).

James Johnson

From **Ajgunle**: Israel's persistent relapse into idolatrous practices, thereby incurring God's divine displeasure was of their making (Judges 8: 33-35), although, they had God's word, which clearly warns against any involvement in idolatrous practices. But because they were carnally minded, they intentionally refused to obey Him (Rom. 12: 1-2; 7: 14-25).

Gideon was a man with a humble heart. He saw the necessity of having a quiet time alone in the winepress. Thus, he was a willing tool in effecting the purposes of God. The awful consequences of the sin of a nation on the life of a righteous man is evidenced in Gideon's beating of wheat in a winepress.

We suggested that Gideon's offering of his sacrifice upon a rock, signifies the centrality of Christ in every sacrifice offered by us (Judges 6: 20; 13: 19; 1 Cor. 10: 4; Heb. 13: 15).

"The fearful and trembling" had no place in the army of Israel. This is because fear tends to undermine our faith in God, and limit His ability to work on our behalf. The principle is still "the battle is the Lord's" (Deut. 20: 1-8; 2 Tim. 1: 7).

The Lord is not restrained by numbers (1 Sam. 14: 6). As Gideon's men had to do whatever he did for a successful victory, so must we do (Judges 7: 17, 18; Heb. 12: 2-3; John 2: 5).

F. Ntido, G. Okwena

From Birkenhead: Once again, Israel had failed to live up to God's reasonable expectations. The familiar cycle of disobedience and oppression was again set in motion. So the Israelites began to adopt elements of Baalism, the tribal confederacy [Comment 1] became disunited and fragmented. Israel was no longer a competent fighting force.

In an attempt to guard his crop from the oppressors, Gideon had resorted to threshing wheat in a winepress. It was here that he encountered an angel of the Lord, who told him that he was to be the deliverer of Israel. Gideon was a lowly man, who felt himself unable to fulfil his divine calling. With the help of the Holy Spirit, however, he was able to perform mighty deeds which other men would find daunting (Judges 7: 14). God can often use those who lack talent or status, if they are ready to yield to the power of His Spirit. When a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, no task will appear too difficult.

Gideon was instructed to tear down the altar of Baal and the Asherah that stood beside it. Having carried out this task, Gideon built a new altar, upon which he sacrificed a bullock. This action indicated his complete devotion to Jehovah in the face of antagonism from his fellow-countrymen and even his own family. The act of iconoclasm soon led to furore amongst the townsmen of Ophrah, but Gideon's faith remained unshaken.

As the enemy advanced across the Jordan, Gideon summoned his fellow-tribesmen to holy warfare. The force of thirty-two thousand men, however, was soon whittled down by a series of unusual tests. The people were forced to show confidence in their God; the victory was to be achieved by divine activity, not by human effort.

The barley loaf was the staple diet of the Israelites, not the food of kings and princes. • The dream of the enemy soldier showed that God was about to use an ordinary man to achieve a mighty victory. We may consider ourselves to be weak and small in number, but God is all-powerful and He can work through us (2 Cor. 4: 7; Zech. 4: 6). It is when we humble ourselves before God that He is able to use us to the greatest effect (2 Cor. 12: 9).

The Israelites' strategy was not so much to fight a pitched battle as to stand calmly in faith in God (Heb. 11: 32-34). As the jars were broken, the fresh supply of air revived the smouldering wicks, spreading panic within the enemy camp. It was suggested that we too are like the hidden light: we may have a hidden potential which can be used at just the right moment.

The victory was such that it was used for many years to remind the Israelites of the mighty exploits of God (Is. 9: 4; 10: 26). Gideon had

not enlisted the help of Ephraim, however, and they now felt they had been deprived of battle honours. Ephraim appears to have enjoyed supremacy over other tribes during **the** early period of the settlement. They probably felt uneasy about a strong bloc of northern tribes, from which they had been excluded.

Gideon, however, brings no glory to himself but reminds the Ephraimites of the vital task which had been committed to them (7: 24). Gideon's tactful reply, when compared with that of Jephthah (12: 2, 3), reminds us that "a soft answer turneth away wrath, but a grievous word stirreth up anger" (Prov. 15: 1). Carefully chosen words can often defuse an explosive situation [Comment 2].

Ephraim had failed to learn that victory was a divine right, and was not achieved by human strength. As God's people, we should not be resentful when we are not chosen for a task which is entrusted to others. Each is chosen for a specific task.

The people of Succoth and Penuel clearly did not expect Gideon to experience success, and thus were high-handed. This is a further indication of the disintegration of the tribal confederacy [Comment 1]. It is possible that we too may recognize a need, but fail to get involved. Are we prepared to give help when it is needed?

The author concludes with a comment on the state of the nation: "the children of Israel... went a whoring after the Baalim" (8: 33). The wheel had turned full circle; the Israelites had forsaken their God, and idolatry had become widespread once again.

J. B. Williams, P. E. Turner

From **Birmingham**: The children of Israel were in deep trouble again. They had done that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Their enemy was Midian who prevailed against Israel. Previously, under Deborah the people prevailed (Heb. to be stout, i. e. resolute and stubborn) against Jabin, a gradual victory over the enemy with self and collective discipline and order. Now it was the enemy who gradually wore down the people.

At this time there was no war. Midian and Amalek (pictures of the world and the flesh) walked freely through the land over the newly sown seed. They spoiled the people who hid from the enemy in caves and dens of the mountains.

It was when Israel had sown that they came and destroyed the increase of the earth and left no sustenance in Israel and, like locusts, came into the land to destroy it. 'Sown' may bring the picture of the parable of the sower to mind (Mk. 4). The sower soweth the Word. It

was God's will **that the seed sown should yield fruit, grow up and increase"** (Mk. 4: 8). Not only **in the world** (this may be implied in the use of the word **earth in 6: 4**), **but** also amongst **the people of God** (this may be implied **in the use of the word land in v. 5**); **the "word of the truth of the gospel"** should **bear fruit**. Paul says of **the word in Colossians: "which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing, as it doth in you also, since the day ye heard"** (Col. 1: 5-7). Amongst God's people there should be **that increasing in the knowledge of God** (see Col. 1: 9-10).

Sadly **Midian (and the Amalekites and the children of the East)** destroyed **the increase of the earth and came into the land to destroy it. It is the thorns, namely the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things that choke the word and it becomes unfruitful. We are warned, "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy... after the tradition of man ... after the rudiments of the world (Col. 2: 8) and in 2 John 8 "Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which we have wrought, but that ye may receive a full reward", and again "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown" (Rev. 3: 11).**

Defeated, distressed **and in fear of death**, Israel **hid** themselves from **the enemy with whom they could not war**. They **had** rejected God **and God had rejected them**. **It is those that know their God who shall be strong and do exploits**. Against **this background and amidst such** national spiritual poverty, **there was at least one found hiding from the enemy, but not in distress and fear; rather in the secret place knowing his God (see Ps. 91). "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour"** (Heb. force, strength) (v. 12). Gideon threshed **wheat in the winepress**, not where **wheat was normally threshed, but from this we may learn of one secretly (Mat. 5) at all seasons (Eph. 6: 19) and everywhere (1 Tim. 2: 8) praying to his God**. These were not **wasted moments with Gideon. He threshed, literally means, he beat out the ears with a stick; the method used by the poor (Ruth 2: 17). It takes time to thresh wheat as it will take us time to learn of the One of whom the wheat speaks. We see Gideon amidst poverty, in an obscure place, but in the secret place progressing in intimate knowledge of that lovely One of whom the fine flour of the wheat would speak. He offered that which was right "even corn beaten out of full ears" (Lev. 2: 14, AV). Not for him a cursory read of the Word, rather long hours of beating out to appreciate its meaning and be touched by the fragrance of the Man of whom it speaks. There may well be poverty and fear around, but we need not be similarly affected and resigned to distress and fear. We rise above it by knowing Him.**

This **beating out took place in the winepress, with which we associate wrath and suffering (Rev. 14: 19-20). Paul said "that I may**

know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3: 10).

Gideon was a very humble man, his family was the poorest and he the least member of it, a fitting attitude for the man of God. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall exalt you" (Jas. 4: 10).

We might draw a question mark beside the signs frequently requested by Gideon, but in the first at least we felt he commends himself, for it is preceded by "Depart not... until... I bring forth my present (mg. 'offering'), and lay it before thee". Similar in character is the promise made in Malachi 3: 10 "Bring ye the whole tithe... prove Me... if I will not... pour you out a blessing". So we might view these signs as fulfilment of a promise as a consequence of his faith and obedience.

Gideon's first task in the enemy's destruction was the cleansing of his own household. There had to be the deposing of earthly things and the exalting of God's things. He had to take a bullock belonging to his father. It speaks of the strong one, the chief of the herd, and what it represents may speak of the place earthly things had in Gideon's family. Idolatry was rife. Having taken the bullock, Gideon was then to throw down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah. The Asherah was broken up and its wood used as the altar for God. There needs to be a complete reversal of priorities in those who would serve God. We learn from Paul that covetousness is idolatry and in another place of those "whose God is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things (Phil. 3: 19).

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: 6: 1-6. In the statement of v. 1 "and the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord", it was noted that the word "again" was missing, in contrast to 3: 12 and 4: 1. Some felt that this was an indication that, the events unfolded in chapters 6, 7 and 8, including the seven years of Midianite oppression, took place during the latter years of the oppression by Jabin.

6: 11-24. This section deals with the call of Gideon. He was a man who possessed the qualities that God could use in the saving of His people. We felt that these qualities were, valour (v. 12), humility (v. 15) and faith (Heb. 11: 32, 33), qualities that God delights in (Is. 66: 2). Gideon's reaction to the call of the Lord was to seek the assurance of a sign. This sign was graciously granted in the consuming of an offering. Having received this assurance, Gideon's first reaction was to worship. This is testified to by his building an altar, which he named Jehovah-Shalom, in view of the Lord's words to him in v. 23.

We spent some time discussing the angel of the Lord, who had appeared to Gideon. Gideon's manner of address to the angel (v. 15), and his reaction to having seen the angel (v. 22), and the use of the word Lord or Jehovah in v. 16, led us to believe that this was no ordinary heavenly messenger, but One of the Trinity [Comment 3].

6: 25-32. Having been called by God and assured by a sign, Gideon now underwent a test. The test was to destroy the altar of Baal that was within his own family. Gideon learned that enemies and failure within his own house must first be dealt with, before he could deal with enemies and failure without. If we countenance sin and failure among ourselves, we will find no respite from those who would oppose us. We felt that although perhaps fearful, Gideon nevertheless performed the deed and passed the test.

6: 33-40. Faced with a greater task Gideon sought a second sign of assurance from God, in consequence of which, he would face a second test, as we shall see in chapter 7. This further sign of the dew and the fleece was also graciously granted without rebuke. Some felt that these signs were needed to bolster Gideon, as he was someone who had been brought up in a semi-pagan atmosphere.

7: 1-8. We now have the second test faced by Gideon, the reducing of his army from thirty-two thousand to three hundred men. The main reason for this reduction is given in v. 2, that Israel should not ascribe the victory to their own power but, to God's. Let us not be hasty to congratulate ourselves on our achievements, but rather give glory to God.

The test of the manner of drinking water, showed which soldiers remained alert to their task and those who carelessly indulged themselves.

7: 16-25. These verses record the overthrow of the great host. Several points in the section were considered worth noting. Firstly, the battle was fought and won in God's name (vv. 18, 20). We also felt that the order of the battle cry was significant, God first then Gideon.

The act of breaking the pitchers, revealing the torches and shouting the battle cry, spoke to us of the Christian's opportunity to both sound forth and shine forth for God. We noted that in contrast to the great losses among the fleeing foe, not one of Gideon's men was lost (8: 4).

8: 1-9. The protests of the men of Ephraim at not being initially called to the fight, are wisely and diplomatically handled by Gideon. A soft answer indeed turns away wrath (Prov. 15: 1). There is a contrast between the men of Ephraim and those of Succoth and Penuel.

Although the former chided with Gideon, they did not withhold their aid when asked, so they were treated with diplomacy, as friends. In contrast, those of Succoth and Penuel were warned as to a future day of reckoning, when the victor would return after subduing his enemies. In the context of the actions of Succoth and Penuel, we recalled our Lord's words, "He that is not with me is against me" (Mat. 12: 30).

8: 10-21 Describes **the** recompense of judgement on **the** inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel, when words out of their own mouths condemned them (see vv. 6-9 and 15-17). These evil men are examples of others in a future day (Mat. 12: 36, 37).

Alex Reid

From Derby: Apart from Samson, Gideon is dealt with in far more detail than any other of the judges. The Gideon story begins in much the same way as the raising up of the other judges in time of oppression.

Apart from Deborah the prophetess, this is the only mention of a prophet in Judges. Is there any significance in this? Can the messenger that revealed himself to Gideon be identified in any way with the prophet [Comment 4]?

Gideon's call follows a similar pattern to that of Moses in Exodus 3 and 4. It was the answer of the Lord to an oppressed people. Having been commissioned, both Moses and Gideon objected, both were assured of the presence of the Lord, and both sought for a sign.

Gideon was conscious of his own weakness and he had many questions to ask. He seemed to recognize that there was something unique about the person who was speaking with him. The divine imperative is clearly seen in the words, "Have not I sent thee"? Later at the bidding of the Lord he threw down the altar of Baal in his father's house. Gideon showed courage in what he did (his name means 'hewer', 'smiter'). This was an act of defiance and he took on the name of Jerubaal (let Baal plead).

The sign of the fleece is a further indication of the reluctance of Gideon to respond to the call to lead the people. This was in spite of the fact that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (6: 34), and already preparations were well in hand in sending out messengers and gathering together those who were to quell the Midianite invasion.

In chapter 7 the final preparations are concerned with questions of manpower and morale. Victory was not to be achieved by large numbers, and these had to be drastically reduced. Deuteronomy 20 clearly sets out some of the criteria for those who go up to battle. Among these are those who are fearful and fainthearted, and this would seem to indicate that these would weaken the morale of their brethren.

The spring of Harod, i. e. the spring of trembling, is evidently linked with "whosoever is fearful and trembling" (7: 3).

The nature of the second test to reduce further the numbers is not quite clear, although it would seem that those who lapped putting their hands to their mouths adopted a more watchful and vigilant attitude against any possible enemy attack.

The final events in the life of Gideon come almost as an anticlimax, particularly the requesting of the golden earrings taken as spoil in battle. From these he made an ephod and it became a snare unto Gideon and his house. He had a large household, and lived to a good old age. Abimelech, a son of Gideon by a Shechemite concubine, opens up another chapter of oppression and treachery.

Heb. 11: 32 gives Gideon a place among the heroes of faith. Lessons from his life we can surely learn, in that, he responded to the call of the Lord, that from weakness he was made strong, and became mighty in battle.

A. G. Willis, G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: As we continue our study in the Book of Judges, we begin to realize Israel's lost vision of the glory of the great eternal I AM.

In these chapters we see the prominence and activity of Jehovah in the kingdom of God in His scrutinizing and in judgement (6: 1); in witness (6: 8-10); in the form of an angel (6: 11-14), in raising a deliverer (6: 14) in His sovereign grace and wisdom and in the choice of Gideon (6: 15; 1 Cor. 1: 26-29) as well as by His deliverance (7: 7) and in His ultimate blessing of forty years of quiet and rest (8: 28).

In the Son of Man, who is Son over God's house, we see the same searching activity and judgement in the first three chapters of Revelation.

For us it may be important to understand the purpose in the typical teaching of the different nations that Jehovah delivered Israel into. This is illustrated in the captivity of Babylon, for Israel ceased from idolatry.

In crying to Jehovah, they did not acknowledge their sin, and so a prophet was sent from Jehovah to remind them of their forgetfulness and disobedience. Obedience is certainly the keynote to Israel's blessing of rest in the land (Josh. 1: 7, 8).

Though Gideon was a mighty man of valour and faith (Heb. 11: 32), yet his humility reminds us of the confession of Paul (Eph. 3: 8). This is also seen in his answer to Ephraim (Judges 8: 1-3).

It was strange that he proved the Lord in the matter of signs (Mat. 12: 39). The possible understanding of this may be in the light of his own insignificance against such an innumerable confederacy (Judges 6: 5, 15). Another notable feature was that he was not carried away with the success of the battle (Judges 8: 23).

Though (6: 18) suggests a meal offering, it also included a kid which was consumed by fire - a burnt offering (Judges 13: 16-19). Would this offering be the foundation of the revelation of Jehovah, as Jehovah-Shalom (Lev. 3: 5) [Comment 5]?

How prone Israel were to return to idolatry (Judges 8: 33). Even Gideon was snared into making a golden ephod, which they went a whoring after. Was the ephod also associated with the altar of Ophrah [Comment 5]?

The contempt of Succoth and Penuel (Judges 8: 4-9) was very serious for they challenged not only the sword of Gideon, but the sword of Jehovah (Judges 7: 20). The severity of the punishment was justified in this form of blasphemy. W. Townsend

From **Liverpool:** *The Midianite Oppression* Another decline into evil brought the inevitable anger of the Lord, and this time the enemy were the nomadic Midianites and the Amalekites.

The Prophet and the Angel. The prophet was sent to make the connection for the people (which they evidently failed to make for themselves) between their oppressed state and their spiritual condition, and to remind them of their covenant relationship. The angel of the Lord on the other hand came to Gideon because he had work for him to do in delivering the people of God. It seems that the 'Angel' was the Lord Himself, a thought which seems to have occurred to Gideon (6: 22) [Comment 3].

Gideon. Clearly Gideon was a mighty warrior. God said so (6: 12) and the Midianites had heard of his fame too (7: 14), and he was also a man of faith [Comment 6]. His reluctance to take on the divine commission seems to come more from real humility rather than from trying to wriggle out of it. He was not rebuked by the Lord for seeking confirmation, which would be a pointer to the fact that he was genuinely trying to be assured. In fact he carried out his first commission swiftly and effectively and was named 'Jerub-Baal' for his pains, a direct challenge to the power of the idol.

The Fleece. It was felt that this direct method of trying to determine God's will is inappropriate for Christians today as we have the Scriptures to guide us. However, it is often obvious (especially in retrospect) that the Lord has given us signs to His will by arranging the circumstances of our lives in areas where the Scriptures are not specific. God's patience with

Gideon is remarkable in view of the severity with which others were rebuked who demanded confirmation from God, and we could only take it that Gideon was not lacking in faith; i. e. he knew God could do it, but wanted to be sure He was really asking him to do it.

Action. The Israelites, already outnumbered by more than four to one, had their small army drastically cut on the direct orders of the Lord so that they could not boast of the victory. Why the two-stage reduction though? First the fearful were eliminated, then the less watchful. What was left of Gideon's army employed a psychological strategy which, coupled with the defeatist spirit given to the enemy by the Lord, caused panic and fear and brought about a famous victory. Not only does God work for those who are His but also against those who oppose Him.

Responding to challenge. The **Ephraimites** were a proud **tribe** who sought political supremacy within Israel and were offended at not being given a prominent role in the battle. Gideon was tactful and we see how in practice "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Prov. 15: 1). He was not so gentle with the opposition he encountered at Succoth and Penuel. Why? We considered that the people of Ephraim though sulking were for the Lord and on the side of His people. Succoth and Penuel on the other hand were in opposition and showed a spirit of rebellion and had to be dealt with accordingly. It is a matter of spiritual discernment when to smooth over a difficulty and when to confront and come out in judgement.

Gideon's two mistakes. The desire for monarchical government which **came** to the fore in the time of Samuel was evidently in the hearts of the people by this period in their history. Wisely Gideon declined their offer asserting that the Lord shall rule over them. He made a mistake, however, in making the ephod which became an idol to the people. It is always a danger to leaders among God's people that something introduced innocently can be abused and turned into something in opposition to the will of God [Comment 7]. His second error concerned his liaison with a concubine which affected not only himself and his family but the entire nation and outlasted Gideon himself. It is a sad finale to such a great life. Each of us needs to be keenly aware of what we do in moments of weakness or self-assurance.

D J

From Nottingham: Our study of Gideon reminded us of the nature of men and women whom the Lord often chooses to do His work; he came from the poorest family in Manasseh and was the least in his family. In spite of this his father was obviously a man not without influence (6: 31). Gideon's reluctance to move into action after clear evidence

of the Lord's hand surprised us. Why did he need every detail confirmed? Was he uncertain about the nature of the Lord's Messenger? Not until chapter 7: 15 does Gideon finally say "The Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian".

It becomes clear during the narrative however that Gideon possessed several qualities which helped him in his leadership:

- (1) he showed military skill (7: 16)
- (2) he showed himself to be a master of diplomacy (8: 2) and
- (3) he showed some cunning in deploying his soldiers (8: 11).

We discussed the depletion of Gideon's forces from thirty-two thousand men to three hundred. Some think the remaining few were the most valiant and courageous of the ten thousand but were they in fact the most fearful [Comment 8]? This would fit in with the Lord's ability to use anyone, however weak, to fulfil his purpose.

It struck us that Gideon's life, while starting at a low ebb, reached a pinnacle with his Midianite victory but then descended again with Gideon becoming involved with idols (8: 27).

The Lord however seems to be very long-suffering and accepts that most of us fail at some point in our service [Comment 9]. In spite of his final failure Gideon still takes his place among the men of faith in Hebrews 11.

C. Edis

From Wishaw: We see in the early verses of chapter 6 God's sovereignty over the nations in causing the Midianites to terrorise the land of Israel. This was God's judgement against their sin which could not be overlooked. God sent a prophet to reprove Israel, to bring them to repentance, to convict them of sin, one who would help to prepare some hearts for what lay ahead.

We thought of Gideon's work (his name means 'warrior'). He was threshing wheat, a humble man in humble employment, yet called by God from threshing wheat to thresh the Midianites. He was a mighty man of valour, yet not in his own estimation. He thought himself the very least, indeed a true spiritual principle, which the apostle Paul confirms, that God chooses "the things that are not, that he might bring to naught the things that are" (1 Cor. 1: 28).

We see also Gideon's obedience in destroying the altar of Baal and that he started with his own household which is another important spiritual principle. There could be no victory over the Midianites until the idols were broken down.

Judges 6: 34 highlights the power that Gideon received: "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon", or clothed him, which is a pre-condition of every true work of God in this world. The incident concerning the fleece did not highlight any fleshly doubt on Gideon's part, but was instrumental in strengthening his faith and may be paralleled with "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9: 24). Thirty-two thousand men gathered to do battle but God drastically reduced the numbers to three hundred men so that Israel would not glory in themselves but give the glory to God. The words that Gideon spoke in 7: 17, "Look on me, and do likewise", has many spiritual overtones in the Christian life, and the apostle Paul said, "Be ye imitators of men, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11: 1). The victory was in human terms, well nigh impossible, but these three hundred men went forward to their positions in one heart and soul, single-minded in thought and purpose as Paul says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4: 7).

God created confusion among the Midianite soldiers enabling the Israelites to rout the Midianite army. The early verses of chapter 8 display the wisdom of Gideon in dealing with the Ephraimites. Such wisdom is prerequisite for a leader, one who can deal with an unreasonable situation with skill and tact; as the wise man says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath". The men of Israel wanted Gideon to be their ruler but his reply was, "The Lord shall rule over you". It was not God's purpose or plan for His people to have a ruler at that particular time. Gideon had confidence in God's government and that He would raise up another judge by the divine Omnipotence of His Spirit.

R. Ure, D. K. Gray

COMMENTS

1. (From Birkenhead): The idea of confederacy is shown in the Scriptures where Abram entered into an agreement with Aner and Eschol who were "confederate with Abram" (Gen. 14: 13). The importance of mutual agreement is shown by the use of the Hebrew word for covenant (*berith*). Now the tribes of Israel had made a covenant with God not with each other. They were not therefore a confederacy but a union being subject to the same law: the Law of Moses. The tribes were not free to make their own laws. The New Testament application of this principle is of vital importance. Today, assemblies are not autonomous and in confederation but are to be united in doctrine and practice being all subject to the same New Covenant.

2. (Birkenhead): But was Jephthah wrong? One of the features of wise leadership is to know when is a "time to rend, and a time to sew... a time for war and a time for peace" (Ecc. 3: 7-8).

I. E. P.

3. (Bolton, Leigh, Liverpool): Some may have difficulty in regarding the appearing of the angel as an theophany since in 6: 22 Gideon does not say that he had seen the Lord face to face, but His angel. Moreover it is arguable that in v. 15 the word *adonai* was not addressed to the angel but to the Lord, as in v. 22 "Alas, O Lord God"

"Depart not hence" (v. 18) must be spoken to the angel and follows immediately on "Shew me a sign that it is thou that talkest with me". Therefore the Lord is speaking to Gideon in the words of the angel, and in showing him a sign is being represented by the angel, if indeed He is not to be identified with the angel.

If the Trinity were at work here it would simplify the understanding of the passage, and those who regarded *adonai* in v. 15 as addressed to the angel would no longer have to construe the word as plural of respect, with the second vowel *a* lengthened by the pause in pronunciation.

4. (Derby): It might unnecessarily complicate the narrative to suppose that a messenger who subsequently departed out of his sight also took the form of a human prophet. While the activity of prophets is very prominent in the period of the kings of Israel, prophets were not absent in other eras.

5. (Dulwich): High places were forbidden while the tent was at Shiloh so that this offering was allowed by a special dispensation and was not to be taken as a precedent. Nor was the altar Gideon was told to build (6: 26) given as a general instruction to the people of Israel. The offering of Leviticus 3: 5 on the other hand was associated with the place of God's dwelling.

As for the ephod which gave rise to idolatry, we are told that Gideon put it in his city, even in Ophrah (8: 27). E. A.

The Offering of Judges 6 is in such exceptional circumstances that it is not safe to relate it too closely to the offerings of Lev. 1-7. The latter were to be offered at the house of God. The kid that Gideon offered was not an animal of the burnt offering and the amount of flour used does not equate with the amounts prescribed in Numbers 15.

6. (Liverpool): God said so before he emerged as a warrior. The Midianites learned the hard way.

LE. P.

7. (Liverpool): By derivation 'innocent' could mean 'doing no harm'. The making of this ephod was not of the Lord's commandment, but resulted from Gideon's request. Was he who made it doing no harm, when such a

result followed? Regarding the golden calf Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought a great sin upon them" (Ex. 32: 21)?

8. (Nottingham): In Deut. 20: 5-9 the officers were to send away the fearful and half-hearted before captains were appointed. Any victory by Gideon's three hundred would be only by the enabling power of the Lord. Such men are not simply content to drink in the word of God, but take it up and handle it, and so being refreshed, become fit for the Lord to use in the day of battle.

9. (Nottingham): This does not mean that we ourselves should regard a lapse as inevitable, or become complacent. Yet we can sing those true words, "To those who fall how kind Thou art". We have a merciful and faithful High priest.

hi • A. %

QUESTION AND ANSWER

From **Liverpool:** Is there any significance in the use of the title "angel of God" in 6: 20 rather than "angel of the Lord" elsewhere in this narrative?

Moses said, "Know therefore this day, and lay it to thine heart, that the Lord He is God..." (Deut. 4: 39). Moreover the sequence of the narrative makes it natural to accept the "angel of God" as referring to the same as the "angel of the Lord". Of the eight occurrences of the expression "angel of God" in the Old Testament Gen. 21: 17; 31: 11; Ex. 14: 19; Judges 6: 20; 13: 9 apply to a specific being (N. T. occurrences are Acts 10: 3; 27: 23; Gal. 4: 14).

In Ex. 14: 19 the angel of God and the pillar of cloud go together. It is a remarkable fact that the total number of letters in the Hebrew of Ex. 14: 19 is seventy-two, or three squared times two cubed, and the number of letters in each of the following two verses is likewise seventy-two. Also the numerical value of the letters in the tetragrammaton is linked with this number in a wonderful way by successive summation. The existence of such a pattern elsewhere as in Ex. 14: 19 would suggest that words are carefully chosen, unless indeed we can be sure that there is an element of sheer coincidence.

The allusion to the angel of God is brought in with directions Gideon must follow to have the assurance (that the God of his fathers was with him) confirmed by the visible acceptance of his present. On the other hand the expression the angel of the Lord is appropriate where Gideon is being prepared to hear the word of the Lord, and thus start to turn the Lord's people from the worship of Baal. E. A.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

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HOW NOT TO DO [T

It is well known that the Law of Moses and other laws given by the Lord generally comprise two parts. Positive commandments, the "thou shalt" of the law, are counterbalanced with prohibitions, the "thou shalt not" of the law. It need not surprise us then that when the Lord instructs by example rather than precept the same twin presentation of truth occurs. For example, the failure of Judah (Gen. 38) is in contrast to the overcoming of Joseph recounted in the following chapter (Gen. 39) in connection with similar temptation and sin. On a larger scale, as we would hope to see towards the end of the year, the closing chapters of the book of Judges present a way of life lacking appreciation of the behaviour that is appropriate to the house of God and which contrasts markedly with the depth of spiritual appreciation shown by the leading figures in the book of Ruth. On an even grander scale, we suggest that in the trilogy of narrative books that deals with the remnant who returned to Jerusalem to build the house of God, Ezra and Nehemiah give the positive example that is to be followed by disciples. In contrast the book of Esther tells of those who did not rise to the opportunity but lingered in Babylon to seek prosperity in the heart of the world's great Empire as a consequence of which the very work in Jerusalem was brought into jeopardy.

Now Judges chapter 9 appears to be just such a chapter. The rise and conduct of each of the Judges demonstrate many good things that disciples of the Lord Jesus do well to imitate, especially those who are fitted and called to take the lead. (In passing, it must be remembered that the judging that the judges judged involved first and foremost the discernment of judging of the law of the Lord as appropriate to their own lives and is a thing that all believers must practise.) In the case of Abimelech, however, we have the opposite demonstrated and we learn by way of contrast. It is of the greatest significance that, as many contributors point out, he is not called a Judge in the Scriptures, although apparently taking his place in the line of those recorded in the book of Judges. Perhaps it is helpful to think of him as an "Anti-Judge" just as there is one coming to rule this earth, the Antichrist, who will be a counterfeit of earth's rightful Ruler.

Although the events of **Judges chapter 9** involve the leading men in Israel and the rule of the entire state is the issue at stake the behaviour recounted has **been repeated** countless times in offices, businesses, earthly politics and in places where there is a power structure. We have in Abimelech the all too familiar case of a man with no little ability who is power hungry and determined to get to the "top". How familiar is the establishment of a local power base, the veneer of respectability conferred by a tenuous legal claim to position, the raising of money from others followed by the ruthless elimination of rivals. How familiar, too, is the way in which the "thieves fell out" and proceeded to mutual destruction. One of the great values of the portion is to see, however, that it reveals the hand of God in such circumstances where the participants have done their best to shut out God (Gal. 6: 7; Prov. 5: 22; Job 20: 4-7).

One of the appalling things about the history of Abimelech is that the standards that are all too commonly seen in the kingdoms of men were displayed within the kingdom of God. Scriptures such as 3 John 9-10 and James 4: 1, 2 show that the same may be true in a spiritual sense in the spiritual kingdom of God of this dispensation. It is here, too, that the fable of the trees may find an application for the refusal of brethren willingly to engage in oversight work may leave the way open for unfit men to lord it over the flock (1 Pet. 5: 2, 3). Like the trees in the fable, saints in churches of God have been known to seek their own things (Phil. 2: 21). But it is reassuring, too, to see the unity of mind expressed in this month's papers which shows an ability to detect wrongdoing and to learn from the way God has dealt with the sins of others (Rom. 15: 4). Nevertheless it is important to realise that such study is no mere academic exercise. Just as we follow the example of the godly as set out in the Scriptures so we must be careful to eschew the example of the ungodly.

I. E. P.

EDITORIAL MOVEMENTS

Most will know of the serious accident that befell our co-editor (P. L. H.) and his family and will be glad to know of their continued progress. We should not cease from prayer on their behalf. During this period I. E. P. was abroad (and reading Bible Studies issues received by saints in Burma) so the editorial burden fell heavily on E. A. and those who prepare the scripts for the printer. Readers and contributors will therefore be pleased to know that it has been agreed that brother J. K. D. Johnston return to the Bible Studies fold while P. L. H. is laid aside.

It will be noted that a new type-face is being used to print the magazine. This enables more words to be printed per page and purchasers should not be alarmed if the number of pages per volume consequently decreases.

E. A., I. E. P.

ABIMELECH, TOLA AND JAIR (Judges 9: 1 - 10: 5)

From **Birkenhead**: Abimelech was prince over Israel for only a short time. It is salutary to notice that an extensive record of this period of sadness and departure from God is given, surely providing many solemn warnings for the wise in heart.

It is striking that Abimelech put himself forward as a leader. This is in stark contrast to the leaders raised up by God who declared their total dependence on Him, and expressed their feeling of inadequacy in human terms.

Our study is a record of internal difficulties; the problems were not brought on by the surrounding peoples. Warnings are given in the New Testament that while the Devil may often attack the Lord's people from the outside, yet there are times when the evil influences are from within.

The second exhortation is to "keep thy heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4: 23). The men of Shechem show the result of failure to do this for "their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech" and soon afterwards the dreadful killing of Abimelech's brethren took place.

Jotham, the youngest son escaped and, standing on the top of Mount Gerizim, he was able to bring to the erring people a message from God in a fable [Comment 1]. They were asked to consider the worth or otherwise of Abimelech, and their choice of him was likened to the trees choosing the worthless bramble as king over them. Jotham, having discharged his responsibility fled, leaving the people to consider their ways. They had obviously failed to realise that God was ruler over His people at all times and any desire for an earthly king brought the people into conflict with the divine will in this matter.

At this stage God intervened directly and sent an evil spirit to divide those who had been united. It is an encouragement to the godly to see here and in many other places, that God does not stand by helplessly as the wicked work out their evil plans. The Almighty in infinite power and wisdom is always able to frustrate the endeavours of those who oppose Him. Vengeance belongs to Him, He will recompense (Rom. 12: 19). The record of these days concludes with "Thus God requited the wickedness of Abimelech" (9: 56) and "all the wickedness of the men of Shechem did God requite upon their heads" (9: 57).

It is valuable to note that the people transferred from following Abimelech (9: 3) to dealing treacherously with him (9: 23). The fickleness of the human heart produces many problems. This is borne out many times in our studies of the times of the Judges. The Lord looks for those who seek to follow Him wholly, whose hearts are stayed upon Him. With such He is well pleased mid surely they will prosper.

Tola and Jair between them ruled over the people for 45 years. They came from different parts of the country and whilst no mighty exploits are recorded as taking place during their period of office it may be that they are notable for the fact that the people had regard for them, and that they in turn kept the people in touch with their God.

A. E. Sands, R. D. Williams

From **Birmingham**: Attacks upon the people of God do not come only from without. With Abimelech we have the serious disturbance from within. Peter spoke of false prophets arising among the people and drew the parallel with the present dispensation by saying, "as among you also there shall be false teachers who bring in destructive heresies" (2 Pet. 2: 1; See also Acts 20: 30, 2 Cor. 11: 12-15).

Such a man was Abimelech who persuaded his own kith and kin to follow him ultimately to their destruction. He was not a judge and was not called of God. How different he was from his father who told the people "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son,... the Lord will rule over you" (Judg. 8: 23).

Abimelech exalted himself and gained the pre-eminence and place of power by subtlety and cold-blooded murder. He firstly persuaded his own family, whom we would suppose to be of some influence for the whole of the city of Shechem was won over to him. How important it is in the recognition of leaders that judgement is not influenced by persuasive speech, nor coloured by some other factor but that a work and calling of God is acknowledged and recognised impartially (see Lev. 19: 15, Acts 20: 28). There is a Father "who without respect of persons judgeth" (1 Pet. 1: 17) and only by having such impartiality can discernment and righteous judgement be carried out. Respect of persons will sway judgement one way or the other (see Jas. 2: 4 AV).

The people on this occasion showed no such discernment. It would seem Abimelech's relationship to the men of Shechem influenced them to accept him (vv. 2, 3) and, influential men though they were, they failed to discern those leadership qualities which ought to have been consistent with his claim (see 1 Tim. 3: 1-7). What tragic consequences came because some could not discern good and evil (see Heb. 5: 14). It reflects the spiritual temperatures of the time.

Jotham wisely discerned Abimelech's true nature as a bramble from which fire would come. How apt God's choice of words. The margin uses the word thorn for bramble (vv. 14, 15) and how big a thorn Abimelech would become to them and how severely many would be burned.

Nothing could go right for the people under the selfish ambition of

their godless leader, Abimelech. The land degenerated in internal strife and bloody civil war.

Abimelech met his end ignominiously and upon his own head he reaped what he had sown. God is not mocked.

R. Wood

From Bolton **and** Leigh: There is abundant evidence in chapter 9 to confirm the summary of the book of the Judges that there was no king in Israel, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21: 25). As soon as Gideon was dead, Israel turned to worship Baal and Abimelech proffered himself as ruler. Although his name meant 'father of the king', Abimelech had no authority from the Lord to do so, whereas Gideon had refused to accept this responsibility for himself or his sons (8: 23). Further disobedience to the commandments outlined in Exodus 20 characterized Abimelech, even to the extent of the murder of blood relations, as well as the acceptance of 70 pieces of silver from the house of Baal to fulfil his project. The thought was expressed that the number of the pieces of silver (70) corresponds with his 70 brethren. The men of Shechem (from where Abimelech's mother came) were instrumental in making him ruler (prince, v. 22), but behind the scenes, Jotham, whose name meant 'God is perfect' was able to escape.

In 2 Kings 11: 1-3, again under similar circumstances, God overruled when Athaliah destroyed the seed royal, and reigned over the land. There was the escape of Joash, and the outworking of the purposes of God eventually. Here, in the form of a fable, Jotham speaks out boldly from Mount Gerizim to the men of Shechem. The application was obvious. The noble Gideon and his worthy sons had declined the proffered kingdom, and none of the sons of Israel in varying nobility were likely to accept the invitation because of the fearful tragedy associated with the fall of Gideon's house. The base ingratitude of the Shechemites, in appealing to the bramble - with its sharp thorns, the lowest of the shrubs, yet with the highest regard for itself - namely the vile Abimelech, to be their ruler, further indicates their total degradation in morality and righteousness. Nevertheless, Jotham foretells the severe retribution to fall upon them.

In the first instance, the operation of an evil spirit between Abimelech and the Shechemites was God's punishment of their common wickedness.

There is a comparison between this and the circumstances concerning Jehoshaphat and Micaiah (2 Chr. 18: 19-22).

Later, Gaal, the son of Ebed incited them to revolt from the dominion of Abimelech, offering himself to be their captain. When Gaal and the Shechemites warred with Abimelech they were defeated on two occasions and finally the city of Shechem was overthrown, the people slain, and the

city sown with salt. This action seemed to express his hatred and his wish that, when utterly destroyed as a city, it might not even be a fruitful field.

The death of Abimelech was not anticipated in the precise way it took place. In seeking to set fire to the tower of Shechem, a certain woman cast a piece of millstone, or an upper millstone upon his head, and the skull was fractured. Rather than face the ignominy of death by such an occurrence, he commanded his armourbearer to slay him. Thus the Lord requited the wickedness of Abimelech for the murder of his seventy brothers, as well as all the wickedness of the men of Shechem.

Abimelech is never reckoned as a judge in Israel. He was a tyrant and a usurper.

In chapter 10 there are two outstanding men of whom it is recorded that they judged Israel 23 years and 22 years respectively. The first, Tola, whose name means "a worm", would ever remind us of the greater Deliverer, speaking of Himself as "a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Ps. 22: 6). The second Jair, means "God enlightens" and we stand indebted for His very appropriate words in the synagogue at Nazareth, when He read "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4: 18-20), to be followed by the clear statement of eternal truth "Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears" (Lk. 4: 21). What a moment of divine enlightenment!

We noted with interest that although Tola and Jair judged Israel for a total of 45 years, very little is said or known about them, while the acts of Abimelech are given in great detail, even though he was only a prince for three years.

Finally, we considered what practical lessons we could derive from this portion in the light of Romans 15: 4. We have clear warnings that God will requite wickedness and, despite the long-suffering of God, He is a just and righteous God.

W. Paterson, Jnr.

From **Derby**: Gideon felt weak and helpless when called by God, but he was able to bring great blessing to the people when strengthened by God. He died and the people forgot him and turned against God. At the end of his life he had made mistakes and the punishment for these falls through Abimelech who was his son by a Canaanite woman. Abimelech had some of his father's courage. He assumed that his brothers would continue their father's rule although Gideon had said expressly (8: 23) that his sons would not rule over the people. That was to be left to the Lord.

So Abimelech went to Shechem and appealed to his blood relationship with the men there. They did not look to either his moral or spiritual ability for leadership but gave him money from the idol's temple to hire mercenaries for himself. Thus armed he proceeded to Ophrah where he callously killed his seventy brothers, so preventing future trouble for himself by eliminating all possible rivals, although none of his brothers appeared to aspire to leadership. As soon as Jotham, the only brother to escape, was told that Abimelech had been made king he bravely delivered a message inspired by God to him in a fable. Like his father and grandfather before him, he was able to use words to advantage.

He drew lessons from the desire of the trees for a king. The first three trees to be invited know they are performing a useful task and each asks, "Should I leave?" The olive was too busy honouring God in sacrifices, offerings and consecrations, and in providing food and healing oil for men, to leave its place. The fig tree provided delicious fruit which also had certain medicinal qualities and it gave abundant shade. The vine had a service Godward and manward with its wine. Unable to find a worthy recipient for the honour, the trees turned to the ambitious, worthless bramble which was very willing to take on the exalted position. It provided no shade, but asked them to put their trust in its shadow. It endeavoured to keep its new power by threats. Then Jotham, using some of the bramble's own phrases made his application of the fable. As the fire was to destroy, so Abimelech and the people of Shechem would die through mutual destruction.

Retribution soon came when the men of Shechem turned against Abimelech. They transferred their loyalty to Gaal. Zebul, the officer, sent a secret message and some advice to Abimelech. However, he retained his own position in the city until Abimelech was in sight and then taunted Gaal with his boastfulness. After the battle Gaal and his forces had to secure themselves in Shechem, from where he was expelled by Zebul. The next day Abimelech showed himself to be utterly ruthless when he killed men working in the field and then made the city which had seen his elevation, into a barren waste by covering it with salt. We see the bramble sending forth its fire when the men and women are burned to death in the tower. When the callous man tries to repeat this act he is killed by a stone thrown by a woman. He who had killed seventy brothers on one stone was himself killed by a stone.

So we see the contrast between the self-appointed tyrant and his father who had a very modest opinion of himself, but who in God's hands was greatly used and blessed and is mentioned among God's worthy people in Hebrews 11.

G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: Judges 8: 35 gives the prologue and background to chapter 9. Again we have emphasized the shocking weakness that seemed to characterize Israel when a judge died. We are also aware of the sinister, appealing power of Baal on Israel in such a condition. The extent of this can be seen in "that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith (Lord of the covenant) their God" (8: 33). This exchange of Jehovah for Baal, in the very place where Joshua read out the law (Josh. 8: 33) was a tragic relapse. The peculiar position of this stronghold of the worshippers of Baal is possibly the keynote of our study in this chapter.

In the toleration of such weakness there is revealed to us the grace of God in His sovereign choice of Israel. It was an unchanging love (Mai. 3: 6) within Himself and for His own glory.

It would seem that the men of Shechem were not of the stock of Israel, and were related to Abimelech through his mother. Their God was Baal-berith (Judges 8: 33; 9: 1-4). That Abimelech was son of such a concubine of Gideon, despite the fact he had many wives (Judges 8: 30) presents a difficulty to our conception of the kingdom of God, with its unchanging principles (Rom. 14: 17; 1 Cor. 6: 9-11) [Comment 2].

Abimelech accomplished his kingdom of Shechem by the murder of Gideon's seventy sons on one stone; which evil was aided (A. V.) strengthened (R. V.) (made strong to kill - Hebrew) by the men of Shechem (Judges 9: 24). The ambition of Abimelech was in contrast with the humility of Gideon. Abimelech is so like the one who exalted himself (Is. 14: 13, 14) of whom the Lord Jesus said "he was a murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8: 44).

There is nothing much to be said for Abimelech as a judge of Israel, apart from the destroying of Shechem, and sowing it with salt. In the parable of Jotham, is it suggested that there were others with spiritual superiority to Abimelech, yet not prepared to jeopardize their security and comfort? This seems to be emphasized by the fact that the bramble was Abimelech - a man, and would also possibly account for the statement of the vine, "Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man" (9: 13).

The house of Millo presents a problem in the light of its later association in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles [Comment 3]. Gaal's intrusion into Shechem was accepted as related to the origin from their father, Hamor (Judges 9: 28, Gen. 34). Though unsuccessful, yet he was the cause of Shechem being destroyed.

God takes "the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the things that are strong" (1 Cor. 1: 26-29). How significant

it is that initially a woman was used to destroy Abimelech. This was a judgement against his wickedness for the cruelty in the murder of his brethren.

Following the death of Abimelech we have a measure of security and stability in the rule of Tola and Jair, a combined period of forty-five years.

Tola means 'crimson - colour of a worm' (Young). The scarlet would denote humility. It was a dye obtained from the cochineal worm. He was of the tribe of Issachar of which the words in Genesis are very significant. One who, unlike the trees of the parable, was willing to submit himself to labour and bondservice (Gen. 49: 15).

If the circuit of Jair's jurisdiction was Havvoth-Jair, in the land of Gilead, its limited feature might suggest something local rather than national.

W. Townsend

From Liverpool: From one of the less spiritually inspired episodes in the life of the great Gideon came Abimelech, who brought so much disaster both on the family of Gideon and the people of God by his pride, self-assertion and determination to aspire to the position of king wisely declined earlier by his father.

It would seem that Shechem was a centre of Canaanitish worship; a relic of the failure by Israel to drive out the indigenous population. The murder of the seventy sons of Gideon, though a regular practice of aspiring dictators throughout history seems to have had religious overtones. Perhaps it was a ritual sacrifice by those depraved men [Comment 4]. This foul deed completed, Abimelech is set to rule, though not to be one of the Judges. He was not raised up by the Lord, and it is not recorded that he delivered Israel from anything. In fact, in a foolish act of vengeance, he later destroyed the very centre of his small kingdom and with his death his cause died too.

Jotham's Fable. From the safety and prominence of a high vantage point overlooking the city, Jotham was able to deliver both a protest and a prophecy. The point of the fable is that those trees which were any good and served a useful purpose were not prepared to give that up for the dubious honour of king. Only the worthless thornbush (referring, of course, to Abimelech) was persuaded. The thornbush was worse than useless, being a positive menace and, ironically, is one of the few trees totally unable to offer any shade or protection! Jotham is saying, in effect, that they could not have

chosen a worse person as king.

Wickedness has a price. In 9: 20 Jotham prophesied that Abimelech and the people of Shechem would destroy each other. In retribution for the evil done by Abimelech God caused "an evil spirit" to come between them: presumably bad relations developed and mistrust grew into hostility [Comment 5]. It is a theme of many of the Psalms that the seeming prosperity of the wicked is brought to nothing and the wicked themselves ultimately are called to give account when God intervenes (cf. Ps. 12), and this is the case here. Whatever Abimelech or the people of Shechem may have thought, God was in command and repaid evil appropriately as He will ever do with unrepentant sinners.

Tola and Jair. There is no indication of what these Judges saved Israel from. Perhaps from the situation arising from the turbulent rule of Abimelech. Nothing extraordinary is recorded about these men and we liked to think that they were just ordinary men who served the Lord [Comment 6].

D. J. Webster

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead): It is good to see all contributors call this a fable and not as many others have done, a parable. A parable is a true story: a fable is fictional.

LE. P.

A parable is told in the Scriptures to illustrate spiritual truths, and in doing so never transgresses the natural order of things.

The fable is a fictitious story that may transgress the natural order of things by attributing reason and speech to trees, birds or beasts in illustrating the points the narrator wishes to make. Jotham's fable is a good example of this, but the points he made by this means were shown to be valid.

The Lord Jesus never used fables in His teaching, but He told many parables. The use of fables would not have been in keeping with the lofty and authoritative standard of His teaching.

J. K. D. J.

2. (Dulwich): The concubine's parentage is not clear though 9: 28 taken with 9: 3 strongly suggest she was part, if not wholly, Gentile.

If the latter, then Gideon was wrong in his association without her having behaved after the manner of Ruth. Being the husband of more than one wife or a relationship with a concubine was permitted under the Old Covenant and amongst the fathers. Like so much that is permitted, however, the will of God had to be discerned as to whether a particular case was right or wrong. Abram and Hagar were clearly in the wrong (Gen. 16) but Jacob, Bilhah, and Zilpah (Gen. 30) were not. Such relationships may have been allowed in an era when the first birth was so important. In the present era, which is characterized by the new birth, they should not be entered into by the people of God (Rom. 7: 1-6). Thus a good guide to the correctness of these things in the past is the test of practicality. In the case of Gideon we read about the concubine immediately after the words "he had many wives" (Judges 8: 30, 31). What, we suggest, is the key point is that he went to excess. The association of Shechem with violence, excess and sexual laxness springing from failure to maintain a separated position is uncannily reminiscent of Gen. 34.

3. (Dulwich): Two different Beth-millos are involved. One was at Shechem (Judges 9: 6) whereas the other was associated with Jerusalem, the city of David (2 Sam. 5: 7-9).

4. (Liverpool): The reference to the one stone (Judges 9: 5) is a particularly chilling aspect of this slaughter suggesting a long-drawn out execution, but there is no indication of any religious overtone save this. Gideon set up his ephod in the city (Judges 8: 27) but the slaughter took place in his house. That is to say the blood-shedding occurred in the place called "Jehovah-Shalom", the Lord is peace (Judges 6: 24). Which was worse; the slaughter of his brethren or the despite it did to the Name? There are surely suggestions here of what the Lord's brethren in the flesh, the men of Israel, would do to Him in Jerusalem, the city of peace. In both we see the handiwork of the Devil who is a murderer from the beginning.

5. (Liverpool): Following the case of Micaiah to which friends in Bolton and Leigh refer (2 Chr. 18: 19-22) we would think that the evil spirit would be from the Devil. *I E P*

6. (Liverpool): Several contributors have made similar comments about these two men. The fact that the Holy Spirit has caused their names to be recorded in Scripture is in itself significant. The meaning of their names and the length of their period of service has also been the subject of comment. They are perhaps typical of humble and divinely enlightened men who faithfully rendered valuable yet not spectacular service among the people of God in their day. Such service will be taken note of by the Lord in the coming day of assessment and appropriately rewarded. *J K D J*

Completion of Comment 6, B. S. 8803

It is difficult to know how Deborah's presence at the battle would make Barak more certain that it was God's will, after the words, "Hath not the Lord, the God of Israel commanded saying, 'Go and draw unto mount Tabor... ' ", unless indeed her credibility as a prophetess was being measured by her willingness to share the outcome of the battle. Alternatively Barak may have wished Deborah to be there so that he could consult her again should the need arise. On the other hand Gideon was told even by the Lord, "If thou fear to go down, go thou with Purah thy servant", and Gideon did take his servant with him (Judg. 7: 10, 11).

E. A.

QUESTION AND ANSWER (B. S. 8804)

From Wishaw: To what intent and purpose did Gideon make an ephod? Was it his intention that it would be a continual reminder to Israel of what God had done for them and did the people misconstrue his original intention?

The weight of gold known to have come from the earrings and other items belonging to the Midianites would be an impressive demonstration of the sheer number of enemies killed. Gideon refused to accept the offer of the people to make him king, but was pleased to leave something in his own city to commemorate the victory.

Yet the man Micah made an ephod, and teraphim (17: 5). The context there shows the irregularity of such a proceeding. Such a counterfeit of what was proper to the sanctuary tended to divination if not sorcery. The words "it became a snare unto Gideon" would indicate that, whatever his original intention had been, he was not immune to their error, unless we suppose that the idolatry developed after his death.

E. A.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8806

LEADERS TO FOLLOW

Jephthah is most remembered for his actions concerning his daughter. Here he made a mistake for, "the blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow therewith" (Prov. 10: 22). The Scriptures do not say what befell his daughter and therefore we also would not say that she was slain. The popular mind has no such qualms and so his name has gone down in the English language as being synonymous with the kind of person who makes rash promises and then stubbornly sticks to them to the point (as such people see it) of foolishness.

The Scriptures, however, paint an altogether different picture. Jephthah was a brave and experienced soldier well fitted to wield the field-marshal's baton. He possessed two qualities, in particular, which inspire confidence in the common soldier who bears the heat of battle. The first is that he was not a man to commit his troops recklessly to the fight even though his cause might be a just one. The second is that when he had to fight, he was a general who won battles. In both respects Jephthah foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ. Friends in Birmingham develop well the way in which the Lord acts to preserve the lives of those He is leading in spiritual warfare. Above all, however, the Lord is a winner of battles. He met and defeated the Devil in the wilderness, routed him at Calvary and is driving him into his latest desperate campaign which will take place in the land of Israel in, we are persuaded, the not-too-distant future. By that time, however, He will have taken us to be with Himself in the day when our salvation will be complete.

Jephthah's lapse in the matter of his daughter demonstrates the not uncommon feature that men who are successful in public affairs often slip up in matters at home. Such should not be in the things of God, for it gives place to the Devil since it is characteristic of the men of this world that they will emphasize or exaggerate the worst and ignore what is good. Whatever happened to Jephthah's daughter, the Lord's approval of his life's work is settled for time and eternity by his inclusion in the roll of honour in Hebrews chapter 11. Those who today fight the Lord's battles can rest assured that the men of this world and their leader, the Accuser of the

brethren, will lose no time in seizing upon and magnifying whatever weakness we may possess or whatever sins we may commit. How thankful we are for the One who delivers us from evil and who, as in the case of Jephthah, will deliver a righteous assessment at the Judgement Seat.

In what has happened to the reputation of Jephthah we can see, by way of contrast, the value of the perfect life of the Lord. The perfection of His private life was attested by John the Baptist and the Father (Mat. 3: 13-17). The disciples who lived daily with Him found Him to be without blemish. His enemies could find no fault though they tried their hardest. Here is a Leader whom we can follow unreservedly. He has never made a mistake, has never lost a battle and has let us see something of His battle-plan that we might have the more confidence to hold the fort of the Fellowship till He comes.

LE. P.

JEPHTHAH TO ABDON (Judges 10: 6 - 12: 15)

From Birkenhead: Having been rescued from their eastern enemies, Israel soon forgot their deliverances and returned to complete idolatry. Placing their trust in material gods, Israel abandoned the Lord. The language problems mentioned later in the account would also suggest a breakdown in inter-tribal unity, as the nation moved away from the central sanctuary. As in earlier times, God punished their apostasy by sending oppressors.

In the straits to which they were reduced under the Ammonite oppression, Israel realised their sinfulness and appealed to God. He, however, was not deceived by such a superficial repentance, because the cycle of deliverance followed by ingratitude and apostasy has occurred too often [Comment 1]. God expected steadfast love, obedience and devotion from his people, and could no longer overlook their forgetfulness and disobedience.

God, therefore, did not send a deliverer immediately, but reminded the people of former deliverances and waited for them to show genuine remorse. By their idolatry, the people had no legitimate claim upon his help. God required active repentance, not shallow profession.

God is gracious and merciful, however, and he finally responded to the penitent cry of His people. In order to meet the emergency, the Israelite tribes who were involved united to form a competent fighting force. All they lacked was a suitable commander to marshal their forces.

Eventually, the elders of Gilead approached Jephthah, the son of a prostitute, to lead their army. Jephthah had been thrust out by his step-brothers and although he reminded the elders of their former hostility, he was not too proud to accept their offer. His initial reluctance was soon overcome after he had ensured his acceptance not only as a normal citizen, but also as a leader, during, and after, the Ammonite war.

Throughout the Scriptures, we often find God favours those who are rejected by men (David and Joseph being two notable examples). Jephthah had been cast out by his fellow-townsmen, and yet he was chosen by God and equipped with the Holy Spirit (11: 29).

Jephthah's dealings with the king of Ammon are recorded in detail. He responded to the accusation of the king by outlining the true historical situation, and concluded by declaring his conviction that the Lord, the only true Judge, would confirm his words. The encouragement is there for God's people in every age to be assured of their spiritual position and to be ready to give an answer when the situation arises.

Seeking to secure God's favour, Jephthah promised to sacrifice "whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me" as he returned from battle [Comment 2]. Child sacrifice was plainly outlawed in Old Testament law (Lev. 20: 2), but was this truth known at that time? It was suggested that Jephthah may have acknowledged the existence of other gods (11: 24) and, with such a fusing of religions, may have come to accept the child sacrifices and sacred vows of the Canaanites [Comment 3]. Others would involve no more than one of his many animals.

Whatever the case, Jephthah only realised his folly when he returned from the battle. He recognised the solemnity of the vow he had made (Num. 30: 2), and knew that he had no option but to sacrifice his daughter. The tragic element of the account is heightened by the dignified submission of Jephthah's daughter, who made no attempt to escape the fate which awaited her.

Following the decisive victory the tribe of Ephraim, who had so far remained idle, now demanded their share of the battle honours. Jephthah's punitive measures resulted in a decimation of the tribe of Ephraim, as those who were unable to pronounce "Shibboleth" were slaughtered at the Jordan fords. Possibly God wished to reduce Ephraim from their haughty position. We must remember that Ephraim had provoked Jephthah to wrath by threatening Jephthah with "we will burn thine house upon thee", (1 2: 1).

A. Hyland, J. D. Williams

From **Birmingham**: Having been driven out by his brethren, because of the blemished birth, Jephthah was brought back by the elders to become Israel's chief and combat their serious decline into idolatry. Prior to this, trouble generally came by direct conflict (or non-conflict) with their enemies; now their gods presented the problems. Israel had broken the first of the ten commandments, "Thou shalt have none other gods before me" (Ex. 20: 3). It is true today that the more this world triumphs over us, the more their gods become our gods. Covetousness which is idolatry, (Col. 3: 5) has its roots in the desire of 1 Timothy 6: 9, which results in foolish and hurtful lusts, leads away from the faith and pierces with many sorrows.

Jephthah is the first judge appointed by the people without a prominent reference to God's intervention. The people however acted in harmony with God's will. It is fairly easy to grasp the picture of Jephthah as a picture of the Lord Jesus, made Head and Chief as believers come to Him in faith, but less easy to see a present day picture concerning the appointment of leaders in the church of God. We would presume the elders recognised a work of God and made 'official' Jephthah's appointment as leader. We would do so today, by giving official recognition to him whom the Holy Spirit has appointed (Acts 20: 28) [Comment 4].

Like the Lord Jesus, Jephthah was driven out by his brethren as one whom they would not have to rule over them. That momentous day will come, however, when they shall look on Him whom they pierced and they shall mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son (Zech. 12: 10). That day will follow great and unsurpassed distress for Israel, when all the nations shall gather against Jerusalem to battle (Zech. 14: 1-5), but the Lord shall fight against those nations. So it was with Jephthah: At a time when their enemy caused them distress (vv. 6, 7) they turned again to him to make him chief that he might fight against their enemy (v.8). For our present day experience we may think of the One who provides a way of escape for us (1 Cor. 10: 13) "God... will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will... make also the way of escape, "and significantly that verse is followed by "flee from idolatry". It is perhaps also significant that Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord in Mizpah i. e. "the Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another [Comment 5] (Gen. 31: 49; see also 2 Pet. 2: 9; Rev. 3: 10).

Today leaders have a similar role though in a reduced way "For they watch in behalf of your souls" (Heb. 13: 17). That is, a course of action prescribed by overseers should be obeyed, to give no occasion to the Devil and for the protection of their own souls (see also Ezek. 3: 17).

Jephthah showed tact, wisdom and diplomatic skill in tackling Israel's enemy, the children of Ammon (11: 12-27) and we may see this as his attempt to provide a way of escape for Israel; "Thou doest me wrong to war against me" (v. 27). Alas, on this occasion it was to no avail. There is a time to flee, when God provides that way of escape (see Gen. 39: 12), and a time for war as happened on this occasion (see Mat. 4: 4; Jas. 4: 7; 1 Pet. 5: 9) but Ammon was eventually subdued.

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: The repeated failure of succeeding generations of Israelites was most vexing to the heart of God. To see the people He had redeemed and brought to Himself, continually bowing to those who were no gods at all, brought forth rebuke (10: 14) which brought home to the people the consequences of their own folly. Yet at the plight of the people, the very being of God was moved because of their misery. We were impressed by the fact that the soul of God was grieved (10: 16); showing the Lord's deep-rooted love for His own. God's soul was grieved, as it had been many times in the past, reminding us of the exhortation not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Is. 63: 9, 10; Eph. 4: 30).

In discussing 10: 16 we considered in what sense God has a soul. We know that man has a soul, a life principle within him which was first given to Adam, when by the breath of God he became a living soul (Gen. 2: 7). So God also has the life principle within Him but, unlike man, who derives his life from God, God has life in Himself and derives it from no one (John 5: 26).

The details of Jephthah's origins, rejection and appointment as leader (11: 1-11) suggested to us a number of parallels with our Lord Jesus.

1. Jephthah was the son of a harlot (v.1) one born of fornication. Although, of course, this was not true of our Lord, He too was placed in difficult circumstances because of His lowly birth.
2. Jephthah was rejected by his brethren, our Lord was also rejected by his brethren, both of His own household (Ps. 69: 8; John 7: 5), and His brethren the Jews (John 19: 14, 15). Just as Jephthah was eventually recognised by his brethren and countrymen as their saviour and leader, so the Lord Jesus was recognised by his natural brothers, and will be recognised also by the Jews in a future day as being the true Messiah (see Is. 53).

During the discourse that took place between Jephthah and the Ammonite king (11:12-28), we see the enemy falsely trying to justify

his attack on Israel, claiming that they had stolen his lands and should return them. Echoes of this dispute are still with us today, as Israel vies with Palestinian Arabs and other Arab neighbours over much the same question. The spiritual lesson we drew from this was that the great Adversary will always seek to justify himself in the eyes of men whenever he attacks God's people.

In discussing Jephthah's vow and its consequences (11: 29-40), we asked the question, did Jephthah offer his daughter as a human sacrifice and slay her, or was she devoted to the Lord in some other way? Since God detested the practice of human sacrifice among the heathen nations, and strictly forbade Israel to follow such practices (see for example Lev. 18: 21; Deut. 18: 9, 10), we felt it difficult to accept that God would allow Jephthah to do such a thing. Even in the offering up of Isaac by Abraham, it was never God's intention that Isaac should die, but, only that the occasion be a test of Abraham's faith. Because of the statement, "Bewail my virginity" (37, 38), we felt that the outcome of Jephthah's vow was, that his daughter would remain a virgin all of her life, totally devoting her virginity to God. A possible rendering of the Hebrew word for celebrate (AV lament) (v. 40) is, "Talk with". Would this tend to support the above view? [Comment 61. If our view of the fate of Jephthah's daughter is correct, this would indeed be a great sacrifice for an Israelite maid, as she would never have a husband and children, thereby foregoing the cherished hope of many Israelite women, that they might become the mother of the Messiah.

The reaction of the men of Ephraim to Jephthah's victory, was to protest that they had not been called to the battle. A similar response was made by this tribe in the days of Gideon (ch. 8). This generation of Ephraimites were worse than their forefathers since unlike them, they made no attempt to go to the aid of their countrymen. There seems to have been a tendency in Ephraim to seek an unjustified place of prominence among the tribes of Israel. The incident of the taking of the fords of Jordan and the distinguishing of friend from foe by use of a password is an interesting one and we would be grateful if some could point out to us the spiritual lesson behind it [Comment 7].

Not a lot is said about the three Judges that followed Jephthah. The main point we noted about them was that they were not deliverers in the mould of Jephthah, but, rather men who gave their counsel and judgements to Israel.

Alex Reid

From Dulwich: Again as we consider **the** falling away of Israel into idolatry after **the** forty-five years of deliverance and rest, we wonder whether this reversion was an escape from **the** restraint, bondage, and enclosure of law-keeping as administered from **the** Judges (Acts 15: 10; Rom. 7: 8; Gal. 3: 24; 4: 1-3).

The plural form of Ashtaroth and Baalim, and the widespread general use of the word Baalim in the Old Testament, might suggest the comprehensive character of idolatry, covering all forms of apostasy. How easily Israel fell into the immoral and licentious living **that** was associated with these idols of fertility. It is important to note how these two things, idolatry and immorality, go together.

There was nothing light in the eighteen years of Jehovah's chastisement. Seven times He delivered them. Alas, they not only failed, but were presumptuous in believing that He would always deliver them regardless of their behaviour (Judges 10: 13, 14).

There seemed to be a certain amount of sincerity in the reality that they had sinned and forsaken God. The evidence of this was seen in the putting away of their idols, and committing themselves for deliverance into the hand of Jehovah (Judges 10: 15).

In allowing the Philistines in the west and the Ammonites in the east to oppress Israel, Jehovah was revealing to them the cruel and hostile nature of these idolatrous nations but we have also revealed to us the depth of His love and feeling for them: "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (Judges 10: 16).

Jephthah was not only a mighty man of valour (11: 1), and of faith (Heb. 11: 32) but a diplomat with a working knowledge of Israel's recent history. His logical argument should have convinced the king of the Ammonites, but possibly the latter's successful intrusion into Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim bolstered his ego, so he would not listen.

In considering the vow of Jephthah, it would be well to realize the nature of such a bond (Num. 30: 2). To break it was a serious matter (Lev. 27: 28, 29; Ecc. 5: 4, 5; Deut. 23: 21). It is emphasized again in the Psalms 50: 14, 15; 61: 8; 65: 1. In addition Jephthah in his dealings with the Ammonites and the Ephraimites, and also in his vow, was a man of unyielding character. Further, this oath was made after the Spirit of God had come upon him. As the burnt offering had to be a male without blemish (Lev. 1), would the offering up of Jephthah's daughter be valid? [Comment 3]? It would seem obvious that Jephthah had a human sacrifice in mind.

The complete submissiveness of Jephthah's daughter is surely

one of the most beautiful things contained in Scripture. Without a murmur, she yielded her body as a sweet savour, a burnt offering.

The repetition of Ephraim's petulance (Judges 8: 1-3) was very costly (12: 6) and though the motive was partly their contempt for Jephthah, and the men of Gilead (12: 4), deep-seated envy characterized the tribe (8: 1-3).

W. A. Townsend

From Liverpool: *History repeats itself.* Israel were in the sad position of never learning from their mistakes during this period. Again they served other gods, again they forsook the Lord and, inevitably, again He became angry with them. This time the Lord "sold" them into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites. An indication of the severity of the Lord's displeasure, coupled with Israel's unwillingness to repent, lies in the 18 years oppression they suffered.

Their cry for help appears very much to be a last resort. It met at first with refusal: You *serve* these other gods, let *them* help you! God was not looking for Israel to say sorry but to *be* sorry; not only to repent *for* sin, but to repent *from* sin. True repentance was coupled with action: they rid themselves of the foreign gods among them and served the Lord. On this basis the Lord could exercise His compassion and must act for "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel (10: 16). For the disciple today, John indicates that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will not only forgive but will cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1: 9). Such is our God.

Jephthah. God's answer to Israel's problem lay in a despised unwanted outcast, a nobody who was, nevertheless, a man of faith. The elders of Gilead had to humble themselves and accept him as their saviour in order to receive God's blessing. This reminded us both of David and of the Lord Jesus Himself. From living the life of a bandit in the hills, Jephthah came to the leadership of the people of God [Comment8].

Negotiations and War. Because of the arrogant attitude of the king of Ammon negotiations broke down and war ensued. The three points put by Jephthah were, however, reasonable:

- (i) the disputed land was not taken from Ammon,
- (ii) their God, the Lord, gave it to them,
- (iii) they had possessed it for over 300 years.

In the traditional manner of the Judges, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah and he won a resounding victory.

Watch your words. It would seem that in a moment of weakness, perhaps a momentary lack of confidence, Jephthah made his vow. He failed to recognise two things: (i) it is not a good idea to bargain with God without weighing carefully the obligation you take upon yourself,

and certainly not to try and twist the arm of the Almighty; (ii) it is a misuse of power to presume to involve other people in such a way with total disregard to their rights [Comment 9]. A vow is sacred before the Lord and must be fulfilled (cf. Ps. 50: 14; Prov. 20: 25; Eccles. 5: 2-7). It is important that we think carefully before committing ourselves before the Lord to do anything and examine the motive behind our words.

"*J will Offer it Up*". Precisely what Jephthah vowed and how he fulfilled it divided us as it has divided all commentators. The majority felt that he vowed to give whatever met him to the Lord, either as a burnt offering if it were an animal or in lifelong dedication if a human being, and that he expected either an animal or a person not from his immediate family to come out to meet him. They appealed to Young's Literal Translation for evidence that the word 'or' could be inserted in v. 31 between "the Lord's" and "I will sacrifice it" making them alternative courses of action. It was suggested that his grief was at the fact that it was his daughter, and his only child, and that he would have no descendants. After bewailing her perpetual virginity she lived as dedicated to the Lord.

The minority (including this writer) took the view that he rashly vowed literally to sacrifice whatever came out without thinking of the consequences, and grieved because of the imminent death of his daughter. She bewailed her premature death in a childless condition and was offered as a human sacrifice; the whole tenor of the passage including the delicately written details in vv. 34-35 and 38-39 indicating an event far more dramatic than life-long virginity [Comment 10].

Both sides accepted that such a sacrifice would be totally unacceptable to the Lord; the former preferring to think that for a man of faith it would be unthinkable and would not go without a record of divine disapproval; the latter to accept that the times of the Judges were times of such low moral standards that such an abomination was, sadly, all too possible.

Whatever may be said about Jephthah, the attitude of his daughter was exemplary. Her willingness to be self-sacrificing for the good of the people of God is a lesson to us all.

Civil War. We have already seen that Ephraim was a proud tribe and constantly sought the political supremacy among the northern tribes. Self-assertive pride caused them to challenge Jephthah who was not as conciliatory as Gideon had been. It would seem that they delayed coming until victory was already assured and then wanted pride of place [Comment 1 1]. The horrible events at the fords of the Jordan have given the name to the "Shibboleth" as a test word or catch word.

D. J. Webster

From Wishaw: The first section of the study illustrates very clearly the principle that has obtained throughout God's dealings with mankind, namely "no man can serve two masters" (Mat. 6: 24). Israel were serving the Baalim, the Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, Zidon, Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon and of the Philistines. Little wonder then that it is recorded "they forsook the Lord, and served Him not" (10: 6).

Because of their disobedience to the Lord, they were sold into the hands of the Philistines and the children of Ammon. They were much distressed: so much so that they cried unto the Lord. The answer of the Lord was to remind them how He had saved them from previous enemies who oppressed them; yet they had forsaken Him for other gods. The Lord stated "I will save you no more" (10: 13). He challenged Israel to go to the gods whom they had chosen. Israel confessed again to her sin: the strange gods were put away: the Lord was grieved for the misery of Israel. In Psalm 78: 34 we read "when He slew them, then they inquired after Him: and they returned and sought God early (mg. earnestly)". In verse 38 we read "many a time turned He His anger away". What a sad reflection on the people of Israel!

The great need was for a man who would lead the people against the enemy, the children of Ammon. Jephthah, a mighty man of valour, was the only one at that time able to fulfil this need. But he had been despised and cast out by his brethren. In the time of their distress they sought him out. Surely this gives us a very clear picture of Jephthah's coming Lord! He was to be despised and rejected; he would not be received by His brethren; yet only He could stand in the breach and face up to man's great enemy. Jephthah made very plain the wrong way the elders of Gilead had treated him. Likewise, in a coming day, Israel will repent of their fearful treatment of the Lord Jesus.

When Jephthah challenged the king of the children of Ammon as to why he was attacking Israel, the king's reply was that Israel had wrongly taken the land in the first place, and he was now seeking its restoration.

Jephthah, knowing well the past history of Israel, could correct the wrong statement of the king. This demonstrates the need that we have to know our history, so that we can correct any wrong statements made against us in this respect [Comment 13]. Peter writes, "being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3: 15).

Jephthah's vow led to the death of his only child, his daughter. It appears it was hastily made, contrary to the advice of Solomon, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God" (Eccles. 5: 2). However, to his credit, he would not go back on his vow. His steadfastness of heart must be admired.

D. R. Gray, M. D. Macdonald

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead): It is a premature judgement to say that Israel's repentance was superficial. As friends in Dulwich suggest, the Lord's response was a test of the sincerity of their repentance.

2. (Birkenhead): It is clear from Jephthah's confrontation with the king of the children of Ammon, especially 11: 24 and 27, that he was trusting the Lord for victory. He was one of those who "through faith subdued kingdoms" (Heb. 11: 33). Thus the "if" of 11: 30 is not the 'if of doubt but the 'if of argument. Men upon whom the Spirit of God comes do not tempt the Lord. Jephthah's vow, though arguably over-reaching himself was made in the spirit of "the assurance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11: 1).

3. (Birkenhead and others): Jephthah "acknowledged the existence of other gods" (Judg. 11: 24) in the same way that the Lord did (Judg. 10: 14) and in the same way that Elijah did (1 Kings 18: 27) (see Ps. 2: 4). To say that Jephthah came to accept the practices of the Canaanites is rather like saying "This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of demons" and merits the same reply that the Lord gave the Pharisees (Mat. 12: 24-28). It was by the Spirit of God too, that Jephthah cast out the Ammonites. The whole point of Israel's punishment at that time was because they had adopted the practices of the people of the land. Judgement not salvation was their lot if they countenanced such things. This is a point that must weigh most heavily in any consideration of what befell Jephthah's daughter. A second, is that raised by friends in Dulwich. By specifying a burnt offering, Jephthah put himself under the constraints of Leviticus 1. That is what Israel were about. Others might offer this or that sacrifice but Israel must offer according to the divine commandment. Apart from such fundamental considerations as the abhorrence to the Lord of human sacrifice we may well think that the use of the expression "burnt offering" precludes the literal sacrifice of a person.

4. (Birmingham): Jephthah was already a leader. What we have here is a dispute amongst leaders as to who was the one best fitted for the job. It is to the credit of the elders of Gilead that they, like Joseph's brethren, repented. In the light of his past treatment by them, we can hardly blame Jephthah for the way in which he got them to commit themselves to his support.

5. (Birmingham): The matter of the Lord watching over us is well put here. The watching in connection with Mizpah is somewhat different. It is a watching that has to do with the Lord acting as Judge. Jephthah's speaking these words there perhaps shows how familiar he was with God's ways with his fathers as does his rehearsing of God's ways with Israel in the wilderness.

6. (Bolton and Leigh): The word simply means to rehearse or talk over. Where did the daughters of Israel go to do this? The statement about the commemorative act is in the past tense as though it had ceased to be a custom by the time the book of the Judges was written. It has been suggested

by some that they went where Jephthah's daughter lived in her unwed state, (compare Anna, Luke 2: 37) until, of course, she died.

7. (Bolton and Leigh): We suggest the word-test may be expanded into what the Lord said "by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Mat. 12: 37).

8. (Liverpool): Jephthah was not a bandit, of course. He was an outcast, not an outlaw.

9. (Liverpool): It is not clear what friends mean by "rights" here. Scriptures such as Lev. 27: 1-8, which may apply to the case of Jephthah and his daughter, show that his "rights" over her were far greater than what we may imagine today.

10. (Liverpool): Is the opposite not the case? If death and Abraham's Bosom are but two months away then virginity seems a minor matter. On the other hand, if a life of celibacy is envisaged, for reasons advanced by friends in Bolton and Leigh, then that might well have been a matter of mourning.

11. (Liverpool): The decline of Ephraim is one of the features of the book of Judges. In the days of the last Judge, Samuel, the Lord forsook the tabernacle in Shiloh which was in Ephraim. Thus they fell away from the position secured by Joseph. So the book of Judges prepares the way for the rise of Judah and, of course, David.

12. (Liverpool): The rule of these three Judges shows a lengthy period of stability and prosperity that followed the exploits of Jephthah which his contemporaries entered into and enjoyed. Many have compared Jephthah's rehabilitation with Israel's future acceptance of the Lord and so the ensuing peace and prosperity may hint at Millennial blessing. The similarity of the situation after Jephthah's victory with that before (compare Judg. 12: 14 and Judg. 10: 4) recalls the words concerning the Millennium, "I will restore thy judges as at the first" (Is. 1: 26, 27).

I. E. P.

13. (Wishaw): This is a useful point to make. Jephthah was able to show that the claim made was false because he knew the history of his people and of God's dealings with them. It is important that we should know the history of the Fellowship that we are in, and be able to contend for the position that we take and the truths that we hold. He was able to show that the disputed land had been in the possession of the Amorites who had fought against Israel. The land was Israel's by right of conquest. God had given it to them. They possessed it for 300 years - a useful chronological statement. Three centuries had elapsed in which no claim had been made on the territory. Ammon had no just case; it was a pretext on their part to provoke a quarrel. Jephthah was not prepared to *give* up the inheritance that God had given to Israel. The Adversary today uses the same subtle means to cast doubt on the truths that we hold, but our warfare is a spiritual one not a carnal one.

J. K. D. J.

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Bible Studies

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EDITORIAL

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SAMSON: FAILURE AND SUCCESS

The circumstances of Samson's birth are given in such detail and are so reminiscent of the circumstances of the birth of such outstanding men of God as Samuel and John the Baptist (or even that of the Lord) that the reader is led to expect the promised life to be every bit as powerful for God. Alas, despite his exploits, it was not to be and a trail is laid for us to see where he went wrong.

The domestic life of Manoah and his wife, involving his anxiety to please the Lord and her forthright commonsense as they absorbed the wonder of what had befallen them, is full of charm and evidences a robust, but, we think, overall happy and devout home. That they were in a large measure successful in training up the child is proved by "the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him" (13: 24-5).

Our expectation of a life of outstanding success is dashed as surely as theirs must have been when we read the immediately following, opening incident of chapter 14. He "went down", he "saw" (14: 1), he said "I have seen... she pleaseth me" (14: 3). Concerning the carcass, the Nazirite actually "turned aside to see" (14: 8). Later on he "saw" a harlot in Gaza and ended up eyeless in Gaza. Here was a man led away by the lust of the eyes, but with his eyes removed he slew more of the enemies of God's people than when sighted (16: 30). He may be considered as a picture of what the Lord teaches, "if thy right eye cause thee to stumble pluck it out" (Mat. 5: 30), only in Samson's case he failed to learn the lesson of his early mistake and in the end his sight was taken from him. We are left to wonder just how successful he might have been; how many cities of the Philistines he might have taken, had he been able to rule his own spirit.

Although Samson's failures are prominent in the Scriptures, we should not overlook his considerable success. Israel was in a terrible state yet

he won a respite of twenty years (15: 20) and his exploits are surely to be seen in Hebrews 11: 34. His successes when the Spirit of God came upon him were all of a warlike nature from which we learn of those things which the Holy Spirit will always oppose. These include the foes of the flesh, whether seen in the Adversary who walks about like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5: 8; Jas. 4: 5-7), or the flesh itself as seen in the long-running war with the Philistines (Gal. 5: 17).

However much we may rejoice at Samson's successes and recoil at his failures in one respect he certainly demands our sympathies. He was a leader who did not flinch from fighting the foe even when accompanied by fellows who had no stomach for the fight, but would rather sacrifice him to the enemy. In granting Samson victory the Lord gave His verdict on both him and them. Although not actually betrayed by the saints in Rome, Paul's experience must have been similar: "at my first defence... all forsook me... but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me... the Lord will deliver me" (2 Tim. 4: 16-18). The smallness of the Testimony today means that many have to fight alone. But today, the same Spirit who came upon Samson is with us forever. Small wonder then that we may rest on the promise, "lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Mat. 28: 20).

LE. P.

SAMSON - ON THE BRINK (Judges 13: 1 - 15: 20)

From Birkenhead: The account of Samson's exploits draws our attention to the Philistine threat from the south-west of the land. The Philistines had gained complete control but Danites and Philistines existed together peacefully. There was no desire for a deliverer, and no thought of repentance during Samson's career. Thus God had to take the drastic measure of forty years of foreign oppression to encourage true repentance.

God's work began with Manoah and his wife, a couple who had remained faithful to God. They lived in Zorah, a town in Danite territory in the central region of the country. In spite of their faithfulness, Manoah's wife was barren. God intervened, however, as He had in the similar plight of Abraham and Sarah, and foretold the birth of a son.

Even from the time of his birth, it was clear that God had His hand on Samson's life. Samson was to be a Nazirite, dedicated to the service of God (Num. 6: 1-21). There was a strict code of conduct: the Nazirite was to abstain from strong drink, avoid defilement from corpses and allow the hair to grow as mark of the vow. In Samson's case the abstention from strong drink even applied to his mother in pregnancy. In giving thanks, Manoah offered up a whole animal as a burnt offering which signified his complete devotion to God. Opportunity was taken to discuss certain aspects of the Nazirite vow. The reading in Numbers

6 envisages an individual making a vow on his own account, whereas Samson's parents and those of John the Baptist (Luke 1: 15) seem to have taken the vow in anticipation of the birth of these sons, who in their generation served God. In addition Numbers 6 seems to point to the vow being taken for a limited period, whereas there does not seem any indication in the lives of Samson and John the Baptist that their vow was anything other than for life.

An early indication of Samson's unusual gift of power and vigour is found in Judges 13: 25: "the Spirit of the Lord began to move him". Samson may have operated as judicial figure, but he is remembered primarily for his mighty exploits, as a champion of his people against the Philistines. Samson recognized that his life was dedicated to God's service, and must have realized that his power had been given by God, for he speaks of himself as God's servant (15: 18). In spite of this Samson often acted on impulse, violating the terms of his Nazirite vow.

With this vow in mind, we can understand the concern of Samson's parents over his entering into an alliance with the Philistines, a people who worshipped the false god, Dagon. Everything was directed by the Lord, however, who was planning to incite a quarrel with the Philistines. The incident reminds us that God is sovereign, and is not governed by our sense of justice; there are times when God does not act in the way in which we would expect, and it is impossible to predict how He will use an individual to bring about His will.

Further troubles drove Samson to burn the fields of the Philistines by means of jackals (RVM) with firebrands at their tails. He then fled to the rock of Etam, but later agreed to be handed over by the men of Judah, to the Philistines. It seems that the Israelites were so dominated by the Philistines that they preferred to hand over a fellow Israelite rather than risk further trouble. Because they themselves were under threat, they accepted the demands of the Philistines for the sake of peace.

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, however, Samson broke his bonds and slaughtered many Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. Even new ropes were ineffective against the power of the Holy Spirit. Subsequently Samson became thirsty, and prayed to God for assistance; God opened up a spring. Samson drank some water, and so his strength returned. Samson's brief prayer seems to suggest that he only resorted to the Lord's help as an emergency measure (15: 18; 16: 28). He may be contrasted with Gideon who was in contact with God all the time.

Having said all this, we should be careful not to judge Samson too severely, for his name is mentioned in the catalogue of faithful ones in Hebrews 11. Samson was used by the Holy Spirit on several occasions

and even his 'mistakes' were part of God's plan of action. Samson reminds us that men of faith may be also men of failure; we should not become discouraged when we fail, but remember that God can use those who are weak to achieve mighty exploits [Comment 1].

J. D. Williams

From Birmingham: We see in Samson the picture of one who toys with **the** world and is eventually overcome by it.

There were certain things in the world which he plainly wanted: "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well" (14: 3) or "she is right in mine eyes" (Heb. Mg.). This is a risky approach to anything pertaining to this life particularly for the man of God!

Strangely God had a purpose in Samson marrying an outsider, which was contrary to His command (Deut. 7: 3; 1 Cor. 7: 39). The sovereign God alone has the right to alter His pattern. We would still nevertheless question the Tightness of Samson's intention and his folly in exposing himself to such danger [Comment 2].

His life continued in a perhaps more subtle vein. First he placed a riddle before the enemy. His secret he eventually divulged as his wife pressed him sore for the answer. The enemy won this first contest. Paul warned the Corinthians of bringing matters of 'internal' concern before the unrighteous. They should be kept within and settled within (1 Cor. 6: 1-4). Matthew, too, warns not to give that which is holy unto the dogs. The argument is less obvious here than in those later situations in Samson's life where clearly he divulged matters of great internal importance (16: 18, 21). Nevertheless we see the beginnings of folly [Comment 3],

In ch. 15 Samson let the enemy bind him, another act of folly but on this occasion he easily shook off the enemy as the Spirit of God leads **the** man of God (see Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 5: 16). So, in Samson's early years we have one flirting with the world and at times allowing himself to be in bondage to it. His spirituality is such that he easily, at this stage, casts off that which seeks to bind him. The folly of such flirting is all too obvious as we see later in Samson's life.

It is not foreign to Scripture (and as we know not foreign in our own experience) to know of the Spirit's power in service, yet at the same time to serve the world and allow it to rule at certain times and in certain areas of our lives (see 2 Kings 17: 33). The specific problem of worldliness afflicting Samson was one of lust. Joseph had the right approach to it; he fled (Gen. 39: 12) as Paul exhorts "Flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2: 22) and uses the word "mortify" (Col. 3: 5) i. e. make dead. Absolutely and not under any circumstances is there to be any room for

compromise with the flesh. Samson compromised eventually to lose, first his sight, then his life.

It is a strange irony this combination of a 'spiritual' life and a 'fleshly' life, walking, it would seem hand in hand, because they are incompatible. The lesson from Samson to us is that the two opposites can co-exist in the one person for many years, but the spiritual one should dominate; "The one people shall be stronger than the other" (Gen. 25: 23) and "ye cannot serve God and Mammon (Mat. 6: 24). Samson it would seem continued for many years in this compromised state though he led Israel for 20 years (15: 20).

11 is name indicating 'distinguished' and 'strong' gives an idea of his spiritual potential: truly reminiscent of "For the Word of God is a sun and a shield" (Ps. 84: 11). This is what Samson should have been to the nation had he maintained his separated position as his Nazirite vows demanded instead of compromise when he kept an area of his life to himself allowing fleshly desires to rule. He eventually became of no use to God or to himself and to the nation which he was raised up to deliver and protect. How early Samson was enticed, as those of his own people who had been wanted by the enemy came and said "to bind Samson are we come" (15: 10). How often do the delightful attractions of the enemy say this to us and like Samson we willingly submit thinking we will overcome as we want. On this occasion Samson overcame; later he could not (16: 20-21) (see also Rom. 8: 5-13).

We may think of Samson combining 'spirituality' and carnality but there may also be a lesson in the combination of gift and carnality. His experience is similar to the situation seen in the Corinthian church which abounded in gift in the power of the Spirit (1 Cor. 1: 7; 12: 4) yet was carnal (1 Cor. 3: 1) and who were immature (1 Cor. 14: 20). The lesson if viewed from this view point is not to confuse gift with spirituality. The two are different, though they are most effective only while operating in harmony. Samuel's double-life might not seem so incongruous viewed with this in mind rather than attempting to understand how someone could be 'spiritual' and yet at the same time 'carnal'¹. Gift, being, as it were a mechanical function of the believer which he does by the Holy Spirit's enabling (1 Cor. 12: 7; 14: 26-33) whereas spirituality has to do with the person of Christ growing in the believer again by the help of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 2: 2; 2 Pet. 3: 18) i. e. to draw attention to what Paul regards as spiritual, not the manifestation of their gift but taking heed to his word.

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: The portion before us opens on a very sad note of Israel sinning and doing that which was evil in the sight of God. For this they were made to suffer for forty years. God, however, was

preparing deliverance before Samson was born. In blessing his sons as he was about to die, Jacob said that "Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel" (Gen. 49: 16). Could it be that there was a fulfilment of this in Samson? [Surely, yes! - Eds.]. His father Manoah, whose name means 'rest', was of the Danite tribe. His mother, whose name is not given, was like many of the other well-known Old Testament women, e. g. Sarah, Rebekah and Hannah, in that she was barren, but the Lord visited her and she bore a son. Certain restrictions were placed on her. Three times she is told (vv. 4, 7, 14) to observe that "she drink no wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing".

We considered the description "very terrible" that she gave to the angel of God as she told Manoah about the angel's appearance to her. Was "the angel of God" the Lord Jesus? His name was wonderful (see Isa. 9: 6) [Comment 4]. The angel revealed to the woman that the son to be born would "begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (v. 5). Yet Manoah asked the man of God (v. 12) "What shall be the manner of the child and what shall be his work?" [Comment 5]. We were reminded that whereas Egypt is a type of the world and Amalek is a type of the flesh, the Philistines are a type of the Devil [Comment 6]. Manoah tried to detain the angel with an offering, but God sent down fire and the angel was seen no more. Manoah was fully convinced that the angel was from God and declared, perhaps in fear: "We have seen God" and expected to die as a result. Thus Samson was born, and like so many others chosen by God, the Lord was with him.

Without detracting from Samson, we noted several points with regard to his mother:

1. She was disappointed in having no children.
2. She was privileged because the man of God visited her.
3. She was godly because she did not complain of barrenness, but had faith in God that He would grant her a son.
4. She was happy as her prayer was answered.
5. She was sorrowful when Samson took a wife from Timnah.

Samson was born for a specific task, which was designated for him before his birth. It was a deliverance started through Samson but was finished by David. Samson was the last judge of Israel until Samuel. [What about Eli? See Comment 8 - Eds.].

No more is heard of his father and mother and, while they were obviously displeased that he took to wife of the "uncircumcised Philistines", it was not made known to them that this was all in Cod's purpose.

The evidence of Samson's strength is seen as he tore the lion apart, and then follows the challenge of the riddle that he put to the men of

Timnah. Using the threat of death, the men of Timnah obtained the answer to the riddle from Samson's wife and although Samson was avenged by the destruction of the wheat fields, using the 150 pairs of jackals (RVM) and firebrands, the Philistines' revenge resulted in a terrible death by burning of his wife and her father.

Despite the Philistines' great numbers, Samson was able with God's help to mete out punishment and judgement upon them in slaying a thousand of them with the jaw-bone of an ass.

Just as Satan thought he had won the victory when Christ was hanging on the Cross, so the Philistines felt that Samson was now under their control. How wrong! The warning is clear, we must not tamper with God's things.

W. Paterson, *Jnr.*

From Derby: In our consideration of Samson, we had a look at the requirements of those who wished to take the vow of the Nazirite (Num. 6: 1-12). It would seem that the only part of the vow which Samson observed was that relating to his hair. Certainly he paid scant regard (if any) to the part relating to dead bodies. In trying to explain why Samson acted in what appeared to be a self-centred way (i. e. 14: 1, 2), we would think that it appears that he had been spoiled while young. Owing to the fact that his parents knew he was special they would not have denied him *anything* he *wanted* [Comment 7]. However, this does not conceal the fact that God was able to use him.

How was God able to use him? He brought before the children of Israel their need of deliverance from the hand of the Philistines, and did something about it by discomfiting them with his own actions. We call to mind the way he sent the 300 foxes (probably jackals) into their crops. After this we read of how he confronted the Philistines and "smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter" (15: 8). Although it was evident that Samson had "played with fire" in these chapters yet God seemed to set His seal of approval on Samson in the valedictory statement at the end of chapter 15, "And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years".

The lesson we can learn for today is that Samson was endued with the Holy Spirit, yet his life wasn't pure. We too, though endowed with the Holy Spirit, oftentimes do not lead pure lives, yet God is still willing to use us.

L. E. Foster, G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: Though in Judges 13 the evil is not specified, the judgement of forty years is very significant. The degree of responsibility accorded to their repeated departure to do evil in the sight of Jehovah must have been great to culminate in their longest period of servitude.

In Numbers chapter 6 the vow was taken to Jehovah, in contrast to Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, who were separated before, or from their birth. In the case of Samson and John the Baptist they were selected by God for a specific work (13: 5; 1 Sam. 1: 28; Luke 1: 16, 17).

Separation as a Nazirite must be considered in contrast to the separation of the nation and the priesthood. Its limited feature may have a counterpart in the New Testament, in those who set themselves or are set apart for a specific purpose in service (1 Tim. 3: 1-3; Gal. 1: 15).

Though there was no general prohibition about alcohol consumption in Israel as a nation, yet the holy character of priesthood service, or the devotional responsibilities of the Nazirite could not permit the lack of self-control, or deterioration of the natural senses due to the possibility of intoxication, (Lev. 10: 9). The Nazirite was also not to eat anything unclean. As we consider Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 we wonder how Samson, or ourselves sufficiently understand the spiritual implications of the holiness of God (Lev. 11: 44). Though we are told that Samson would begin to save Israel from the Philistines (Judg. 13: 5), it is not until the prophecy of Amos (1: 8) that we are told that the remnant of the Philistines would perish.

There is difficulty in understanding the phrase in "that it was of the Lord" (Judg. 14: 4). Such marriages would seem to have been prohibited (Deut. 7: 1-4) and Samson's affinity with Delilah led to his downfall [Comment 2].

That the Spirit of God came mightily upon Samson (Judg. 14: 6; 15: 14) is the key to Samson's mighty power. This, however, was clearly conditional upon him being a Nazirite from the womb, and that no razor come upon his head (Judg. 16: 17). This is a study of victorious power against a fearful enemy, and its loss because of failure to maintain the seal of separation.

Samson's mighty acts of faith (Heb. 11: 32) were motivated by love for Israel. This is seen in his mild submissiveness to the men of Judah. They failed to recognize God's servant. How like the rulers of Israel who, to maintain their place and position (John 11: 48), handed Christ over to the Romans.

Though it would seem that Samson's twenty years as a judge would run concurrently with the forty years of servitude, it is difficult to divine its exact placing.

IV. *Townsend*

From Liverpool: *The Philistines* The story of Samson belongs to the first half of the forty-year Philistine oppression of Israel which continued into the times of Saul and David. Thus **the** events of these chapters **take** place close to the end of the times of the Judges [Comment 8]. The Philistine threat, at least in its early stages, was **far** more insidious **than that** posed by the enemies of Israel thus far. At least **the** Moabites, Ammonites **and** Midianites were perceived to be **a threat** even **if the** Israelites were, because of sin, powerless to do anything about it. But the picture emerging in these chapters is of a passive acquiescence in the subtle domination (cf. 15: 11).

The birth of Samson. The extended narrative of the visits of the angel to Samson's parents and the message he brought prepare us for the almost larger-than-life figure who was to come and single-handedly fight the Philistines and destroy the social interaction that was so dangerous to the spiritual health of the people of God. Though described as a Nazirite, Samson did not take a temporary vow, as envisaged under the regulations of Numbers 6: 1-21, but was uniquely set apart from birth and for life. The significance of the separation was seen in its outward symbol of long hair.

Samson in action. The Spirit of God began to stir Samson and came upon him in mighty power to enable him to do great exploits. We rejoiced that the Spirit of God is with believers today in a permanent way, though we still need to know His filling to do great exploits for our God. Sadly the Spirit of God left Samson. We note that even at the beginning of his wrong behaviour the Spirit of God was using him to confront the Philistines (the words of 14: 4 do not, of course, indicate the Lord's approval of everything Samson did) and we recognized his sovereign right to use even our sinful actions for his purpose.

It is clear that Samson was an embarrassment to his own people. They much preferred the laissez-faire approach to the encroaching evil and did not want to be bothered with fighting them. We need to be on our guard as standards can easily be eroded today without our realising the seriousness of what is happening.

Samson the enigma. It was agreed that, without the commendation found in Hebrews 11, we would have thought Samson had little to commend the spiritual side to his life. He was weak, cruel (cf. 15: 4), self-pleasing, sensual and headstrong. He was an individualist who had the potential to be a spiritual giant and threw away his opportunities. Yet he judged Israel for twenty years and knew the gracious help in

refreshing from the Lord when depressed after the fight. Is it simply a case of only the bad being recorded (a reverse of Joseph)? We did not know but saw the sovereign overruling of God in using his wayward servant to save Israel from disaster.

D. J. Webster

From Wishaw: The angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife to announce the coming birth of her son. She was to abstain from strong drink, emphasizing the separated position of the family and ultimately Samson, who was to be a Nazirite from his birth. In Numbers 6 we learn how a Nazirite was one who was separated unto the Lord. The first mark of his separation was the total abstinence from drink; however, in Samson's life, like our own, he knew failure. He went down to Timnah, the first step in a wrong direction! Stepping on to enemy territory and, entering into an alliance with the Philistines by meeting one of their daughters, led to his downfall.

Timnah means a 'portion assigned'. He left his occupation to seek a portion with the Philistines. Yet, in one sense, it was all in the overruling counsel of God. Samson came to Timnah and faced up to the young lion - a type of Satan. The lion roared at Samson, the young Nazirite; Satan still roars at those who bear the marks of separation unto God. However, in the power of the Spirit of God he rent the lion like a kid. Then he saw the woman who had pleased him well. What a strange contrast! In the power of the Spirit he tore the lion, and then fell victim to the enemy in another form. How often this is the case in the experience of God's people.

Afterwards he found honey in the lion's carcass; he ate some and gave to his parents: "out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness". Our Lord has conquered Satan; and as a result of that victory, on the cross, we have our meat, our sweetness - salvation and blessing.

We now see Samson, not only with the woman, but surrounded with the Philistines as his companions: allied with the enemy. In history we read about the 'Auld Alliance' and alas the people of God have paid a dear price down through the years for alliance with the enemy. Amongst God's people we must guard against alliance and compromise - many often like the Philistines appear fair; but ultimately lead to danger.

After pressuring him, Samson's wife eventually extracted the meaning of his riddle, which was passed on to the Philistines. Samson was angry. Thus he learned in a measure what the Philistines were really like; for his wife was taken and given to his so-called 'companion'. He acted out of revenge by taking 300 foxes and firebrands. It was in anger, and we note that there is no record of the Spirit of God coming upon him

now. By touching the unclean beast (a fox) he had defiled himself. How often we act in a similar way; undignified and in a spirit of malice; but this only robs of us our joy and peace.

The Philistines sought revenge, and Samson took refuge in Etam in "the cleft of the rock". The Spirit of God visited him this time and he killed a thousand men with the jaw-bone of an ass. Do we see faith working here? The bone having done its work was thrown away. He could have said "What a powerful jaw-bone!" but he did not; Samson threw it away lest it detract from the glory of Him to whom all glory is due. Following this victory he found refreshment at 'Lehi'. This is a beautiful picture of Him who was smitten that the refreshing waters of life may flow forth.

M. D. Bentham, M. D. Macdonald

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead): We agree entirely with the attitude of friends of Birkenhead here but we have also to distinguish between weakness and wilfulness in these things. In Samson we see a person making the same mistake over and over again and we are driven to the conclusion that some of Samson's part in the Lord's purpose in Israel at this time was by suffering the judgement of the Lord.

2. (Birmingham and Dulwich): "Strangely" is a good word here because judgement is the Lord's strange work. In the light of Samson's later career we may see that Samson's wrong in marrying the Philistine woman was "of the Lord" not only to bring judgement on the Philistines, but also to bring judgement on Samson himself. Having suffered so at the hands of a Philistine woman we imagine that he would have known better than repeat his misdeed.

3. (Birmingham): We agree heartily with the significance of the comparison between Samson's confiding in his wife from Timnah being a mistake from which he should have learned his lesson, and so been a wiser man in his dealings with Delilah and doubly so in the point raised about revealing truth pertaining to the kingdom of God to those outside. Nevertheless, it is hard to see that this is the major significance of Samson's riddle. The worst feature of the latter is that Samson made a wager and for mere carnal gain at that. The separated man was thinking and acting like a Philistine and had to learn that "the companion of fools shall smart for it" (Prov. 13: 20).

4. (Bolton and Leigh): The angel's attitude towards the burnt-offering (13: 16) shows that he was not the Lord in a pre-incarnation appearance though we agree that the name of the angel resembles very closely the word used in Isaiah 9: 6. *IEP*

This is an interesting point. The expressions used in the narrative are, "the angel of God" and "the angel of the Lord", and these are used in the

singular form. One authority aptly states that, "the relation between the Lord and 'the angel of the Lord' is often so close that it is difficult to separate the two". This is particularly true in relation to the appearance of the angel of the Lord to Moses (Ex. 3: 2).

5. (Bolton and Leigh): Manoah's request was concerning the upbringing of the child (see RVM) which was a proper request given his position. This is surely the lesson behind his wife's having to behave in a way similar to that of the son-to-be. Parents must set a correct example in the matter of the "ordering" of the children.

6. (Bolton and Leigh): The repeated use of the adjective "uncircumcised" in association with the Philistines (see for example 14: 3) suggests that they typify the flesh.

7. (Derby): There is clearly a dramatic contrast between Judges 13: 25 and 14: 1, but the Scripture is silent as to how Samson developed his unfortunate traits. May it be that the Lord will be as silent in our cases. In view of his parents' resistance to him (14: 3) we can hardly say that they did not resist his every whim.

LE. P.

The general impression that we get of Manoah and his wife is a favourable one. They appear to have done all that was required of them in the rearing of their unique son. Their efforts in seeking to dissuade Samson from forming a marriage union with a Philistine woman were also commendable. The advice of parents, however, is not always taken by sons and daughters.

J. K. D. J.

8. (Liverpool): We agree that the Philistine oppression of Samson's day did not end fully till David's day. This, we suggest, is the force of "he shall begin to save Israel" (13: 5). But Eli judged Israel for 40 years (1 Sam. 4: 18) and died at the height of Philistine oppression when the very ark of God was taken. Thus Philistine dominion lasted more than 40 years so Samson's judgeship "in the days of the Philistines" (15: 20) was an interlude in a long running war.

LE. P.

ERRATUM

B. S. 8804 page 58 line 11: replace "men" with "Me".

Eds.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

BS 8808

STRENGTH IN SEPARATION

In his earlier experiences Samson lived dangerously. He skirted the vineyards of Timnah, became involved with Philistine women, associated with dead bodies, and, in general, gives the impression of that self-confidence which is the driving force behind the practice of brinkmanship in which he excelled. The old adage "if in doubt, don't" had no place in his vocabulary or scheme of things. His method of dealing with Delilah's persistent questioning shows exactly the same attitude. He was strong in body when the Spirit came upon him and he thought he was so strong in the inner man that he could control the flow of events and stop things before they got out of hand. He thought he could stand and, failing to take heed of the earlier lessons that the Lord was teaching him, fell (1 Cor. 10: 12).

The principle of the Scripture cited above is, of course, a general principle which has its force in the pervasiveness of pride in the human heart. In Samson's case the illustration of the principle is directed at a very specific matter. His great strength went hand in hand with his separated position. This, too, is a truth consistently taught in the Scriptures. We see it clearly brought out in the case of Abraham and Lot. Abraham stayed well clear of the Cities of the Plain. Lot thought he could maintain a testimony by sharing with the men of Sodom in the rule of their city. In the end Abraham had to rescue Lot. The man in the separated place was the stronger of the two. The secret of this truth lies in the fact that God is in the separated position and the man who is separated to Him will overcome all. This is the force of the Lord's New Covenant command, "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6: 17).

When Samson gave up his separated position he gave up his strength. The circumstances of his end were little short of tragic. His position positively encouraged idolatry (Judg. 16: 24). He was a star attraction

in the world of Philistine entertainment; sporting in the amphitheatre of the unsaved (Judg. 16: 27). As such he was graciously used by God to further His purposes, but who can deny that had he maintained his separated position his God-given talent would have yielded a richer vintage and led to the greater blessing of the people of God?

His life contains a warning for the believer today for the truth of separation is one constantly under attack, and believers are constantly being encouraged to temporize in the matter of separation. Thus we see believers attempting to maintain a testimony in the world's theatres and sporting arenas. We are forced to conclude that, though the Lord may grant a victory, it will like Samson's, be accompanied by the loss of the life for God compared with that fulness that is possible for the separated man.

LE. P.

SAMSON-OVER THE EDGE (Judges 16: 1-31)

From Birkenhead: There can be no doubt that Samson was a man mightily used by God, a champion of the Israelites, raised up to bring deliverance from Philistine oppression. He was possessed, however, of a headstrong nature which brought ruin as he abused his God-given strength. Samson played with temptation, violated his Nazirite vow, and was led into sin, which impaired his relationship with God.

Samson was dogged by a fatal weakness for women and, in chapter sixteen, we find him visiting a prostitute in Gaza. Discovering his whereabouts, the Gazites surrounded him and lay in wait to capture him. Samson escaped by night, however, by plucking off the city gates and carrying them to a nearby hilltop. This incident is yet another occasion when Samson's personal affairs are used to further the Lord's purposes in dealing with the Philistines on behalf of His people. Samson was joined in conflict whilst most of his people were content to co-exist peacefully with them.

Samson's ultimate undoing was Delilah, who lived in the valley of Sorek. The name Delilah (devotee) suggests that she may have been involved in some foreign cult. She had been bribed by the Philistines to discover the secret of Samson's unnatural strength. The fact that a bribe was offered to her, caused us to wonder whether this was necessary to win her support. She also seemed oblivious of the Nazirite vow and all its implications [Comment 1]. After giving a few misleading answers, Samson was subtly beguiled and finally he told of his uncut hair. It seems that Samson was unaware of the dangers facing him, as Delilah tempted him again and again. The plight of Samson reminds us that the attacks of the Devil are insidious, aimed at eventually overwhelming those who are on the Lord's side.

The cutting of Samson's hair indicated the severing of the sacred bond between himself and God, the departure of the Lord from his life, and his becoming like any other man. Samson was captured, blinded, and made to work in the prison mill at Gaza.

On a festive day at Gaza, dedicated to their God Dagon, blind Samson was called out of the prison in order to provide amusement for the Philistines. Humbled in Spirit, he recognised that his power and strength was a gift from the Lord, and prayed for vengeance on the loss of his sight. Samson, it would appear, was not a man given to much prayer, seeking God's help only in emergencies, but God recognised his genuine remorse and granted his request. Samson was able to destroy the temple, killing both his enemies and himself.

It is sometimes suggested that with the regrowth of Samson's hair there was an accompanying return of strength. It would appear that Samson's strength returned suddenly, however, as a result of his prayer (otherwise he could have broken free from his captors) [Comment 2]. Samson's hair was not the source of his strength, but rather the symbol of his Nazirite consecration. Thus, in spite of his earlier moral and spiritual decline Samson, now chastened, manifested a surge of his former spiritual power. In this way, Samson achieved more by his death than he had during his entire life as judge in Israel.

If the record of Samson's life as outlined in Judges is taken in isolation, we may conclude that so much of his life was conducted foolishly. We are helped, however, to see things in perspective when we realise the divine record declares Samson to be among those of outstanding faith (Heb. 11: 32).

J. D. Williams, P. E. Turner

From Birmingham: Gaza was where the enemies of the Lord destroyed the increase of the land, "till thou come unto Gaza" (Judg. 6: 4). Gaza means strong and may well speak of the strength of the enemy for it was one of the principal Philistine cities. It was considered to mark the southern limit of Canaan. It is a risky position for any saint to be at the extreme periphery of accepted behaviour, and that is where Samson went.

Perhaps Samson felt he could overcome as previously he always had. The Hebrew word for Gaza comes from another word having the force of vehemence in it. We remember Peter spoke exceeding vehemently that he would not deny his Lord (Mk. 14: 31), but his strength of resolve changed such that he cursed in his denial. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10: 12).

Samson seemed to enter into sin so easily, yet it may not have been intended for it was in Gaza that *he saw*. How easily we identify with him, for even in lives of seemingly spiritual strength how easy it is to fall, and

nothing seems to tempt quite like seeing. The brief lesson in Samson here is that he was where he perhaps should not have been and it is often in such similar situations that we see what it would be better not to see (see Mat. 6: 22, 23).

The prophet speaks, we believe of the Lord "Who is blind, but my servant?" (Is. 42: 19) and instead of Samson voluntarily plucking (as it were) his eyes out so as to prevent sin, his sins eventually resulted in the enemy plucking out his eyes for him (see Mat. 5: 27-30). That must tell us of the effect of the enemies of God upon our ability to see spiritual things (see 1 Cor. 2: 10-15). The enemies were the Philistines and we note firstly that they laid hold of him, then they put out his eyes (see Mat. 13: 13). He surely illustrates the proverb "Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings (Prov. 31: 3).

But God's power is for those who are able to avail themselves of it and as if to emphasize this, following his sin with the harlot, Samson rose at midnight as if to escape the entanglement of fleshly lusts. He lifted those gates of captivity "plucked them up, bar and all" and carried them to the top of Mount Hebron as if to show contempt for the power of the enemy [Comment 3]. Sin, however, always entices to greater sin unless checked (Jas. 4: 7). "Afterwards" it says "he loved a woman" whose name was Delilah (16: 4). Her name means languishing (i. e. to slacken and enfeeble).

Samson who so recently had known the power of God, became infatuated with a woman who became an instrument of the enemy and she caused him to slacken. Behind her attractiveness lay hidden the Philistines. Samson indulged and divulged. He sinned once too often. He went out as before, unawares that the Lord had departed from him. His strength had gone, the Philistines laid hold on him. His sight gone and bound with fetters of brass, Samson ground in the prison house. This was a tragic end for a man who failed to maintain his separated position and suffered greatly as a result.

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: At the end of Judges chapter 15 (v. 20) and in chapter 16: 31 there are two records of the duration of Samson's judgeship, that is 20 years. The two references to the same period would seem to indicate that the writer of Judges viewed Samson's life as being divided into two phases with the latter being that of his decline and fall. The fall of Samson was undoubtedly linked with his lifestyle. His lax moral behaviour, seen in his associations with women not of his own nation such as the harlot of Gaza and Delilah of Sorek [Comment 4], undermined his separation and consecration to God, thus bringing about his fall. We see that even great men for God can be brought to humiliation by wrong associations. Another example of this is seen in the decline of Solomon who loved many strange women and was led away by them (1 Kings 11: 1-8). The principle is clear:

the power for service of God's servant is undoubtedly linked with his walk.

In our discussion of Samson's surrendering the secret of his strength to the wily Delilah, we discussed the significance of the shaving of the locks of his head (v. 19). The secret of Samson's strength was not in the long hair itself but in what the long hair signified. Samson was a Nazirite unto God from the womb (13: 5) and the outward sign of the Nazirite's consecration to God was his long hair (see Num. 6). Thus when Samson's head was shaven, it was an outward sign of what had taken place inwardly; that he was no longer a separated, consecrated man. We noted a contrast between Samson and Samuel. Both had long hair, the sign of the Nazirite (Judg. 13: 5, 1 Sam. 1: 11), but although Samson was physically strong he was spiritually weak. This brought about his downfall. Samuel was spiritually strong and was true to God all his life.

In answer to the question, why Samson did not discern Delilah's trap, we felt that Samson had become so familiar with his dissolute way of life that his appreciation of the dangers had been dulled, leading to the sad statement that, "He wist not that the Lord was departed from him"(v. 20). The lesson to be learned from this is that, if we indulge ourselves in fleshly things, our awareness of the consequences will be dulled and we will be carried away by our errors. Our last thought about Delilah was that the Philistines would be glad to pay her for her treachery, an echo of the attitude of the chief priests in making their bargain with Judas (Mark 14: 10, 11).

The latter end of Samson paints a pathetic picture; bound, blinded, humiliated, doing the work of a slave and having become an object of sport to his enemies. This is the fate that the Adversary had in mind for all believers who lose sight of the standard of behaviour incumbent upon a follower of Christ. The warning of Paul to the Corinthians, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"(1 Cor. 10: 12) seems to be an appropriate epitaph for the life of Samson.

In the prison house it seems that the magnitude of his foolishness came home to Samson and, in grace, God granted him one last great exploit. In bringing down the edifice of Philistine idol worship it is said of Samson "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (v. 30). In death Samson gained his greatest victory over his enemies, an illustration of Him who was to come who, through death, brought to nought him that had the power of death, that is the Devil (Heb. 2: 14) [Comment 5].

Alex Reid

From Derby: It is clear from Hebrews 11 that God considered the sum total of Samson's life as a life of faith. He did fight the enemy alone when God's people were living in peace with them. He looked ahead to a time when God's people would one day possess the land (Josh. 1: 11).

The last verse of chapter 15 and the end of chapter 16 are the same, as though these intervening episodes are unrecorded. It is as if Samson, being so confident of his own strength and his own ability, was of no use to God who requires His people to be of a humble and contrite spirit (Is. 57: 15).

When Samson went to the Philistine City of Gaza he probably knew they classed him as their greatest enemy. His visit showed again how this strongest of men could easily be brought down by Satan using his untamed natural desires. Indeed this show of strength (v. 3) seems more a "show off" than the achievement of anything for God [Comment 6].

It does seem so far Samson only used people for his own ends, showing little love or consideration. This would include his parents (14: 2 "get her for me") but, at the last he appears to be in love (16: 4). The woman was clearly very different from him; she was cold and merciless. She must also have been a good actor to deceive Samson so well unless his love for her blinded him to her faults. The price put on Samson by the five lords of the Philistines was a very considerable amount. Judas took just thirty pieces of silver for the Lord.

In the first two answers which he gave Samson seems to be playing with what was a very serious matter. His third answer (vv. 13, 14) was very nearly the truth and he probably even deliberately went to sleep close to the loom.

The Philistines did not want to kill Samson but to afflict him. Was the Lord staying their hand for His own reasons (16: 22) [Comment 6]?

Indication is given of Samson's love for Delilah and how much she, driven by twin aims of wealth and his destruction, despised him. The grace and mercy of God is shown in Samson again exercising his great strength while only keeping the outward show of the Nazirite vow, his long hair, and ignoring the inward moral aspect, drink and dead bodies (Num. 6: 3, 6) [Comment 7]. The strength of the vow seemed to be found in the mercy of the Lord who stood by him.

There is a sad sequence in Samson's life. He was betrayed by his own people (15: 11), afflicted by Delilah (16: 19) and the Philistines who destroyed his eyes (16: 21). The Lord had departed from him (16: 20). In prison he was used as an animal and could hardly have been more desolate or lonely. In Samson's prayer, as he prayed to God in his need, he humbled himself (16: 28). Samson prayed for revenge. How could that be the mind of God (16: 28) [Comment 8]? In prison he was forced to keep all three parts of his Nazirite vow. The mighty warrior who had been led by a lad finally exerted the strength given by God in answer to his prayer "remember me ... strengthen me".

S. J. Wymer, G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: Samson's intrusion into Gaza, the very bastion of the Philistines, was not to deliver Israel from their enemies. Yet the grace of God met his indiscretion, and the event was treated with impunity. Though God's servants may foolishly get into difficult areas, He is able to retrieve such misfortune, not only without loss to Himself, but in majestic power and glory for His Name's sake [Comment 3].

After his previous experiences, it would seem sheer folly for Samson to allow his heart to draw him into yet another difficult and dangerous area. Such weakness within ourselves is very apparent when we consider how the great Solomon failed to obey his own precept (Prov. 4: 23; 1 Kings 11: 1, 2).

Two things, the hostility and hatred of the uncircumcised Philistines, and the power of the mammon of unrighteousness are evident (Judg. 16: 5). The hatred of the world is ever active and present under the hand of the one whom the Lord Jesus said "was a murderer from the beginning" (1 John 5: 19; John 8: 44).

Though the bribe was substantially more than that enacted with Joseph's brethren or Judas, the shocking and unscrupulous dealing were the same. The contrast between the bribe of silver and the threat of Samson's wife (Judg. 14: 15) would almost suggest that Delilah was a person of rank, albeit a female Judas, who had the effrontery to accuse Samson of lies and mockery. Having failed in her purpose, she pestered him until his spirit was vexed unto death (Judg. 16: 16).

In Samson we have a strange paradox of weakness, yet the instrument of the mighty power of Jehovah. In his behaviour we see the great danger of trifling with temptation. His bond of love for this woman led him to open his heart and in so doing, to divulge the secret of Jehovah's power in and presence with him. To those who are called to serve the Lord as Samson was, the importance of the implication contained in the locks of separation cannot be over-emphasized.

The presence and power of Jehovah in reference to His people and those who serve Him is conditional (1 Sam. 4: 21), and so we read that "the Lord was departed from him" (Judg. 16: 20). The triumph of the removal of the gates of Gaza was superseded by humiliation, defeat, darkness, prison and fetters.

W. Townsend

From Liverpool: *Undisciplined Life.* The final chapter in the life of Samson opens with the separated leader of Israel going to a Philistine prostitute for his pleasure which underlines to us that his downfall is linked to an undisciplined life. Samson did what Samson wanted to do! Perhaps he was used to being able to "look after himself" by his God-given strength to get himself out of danger. We wonder at the patience of our God. The principle is that sin will find us out (Num. 32: 23). Plenty of warning in the Old Testament is given about the dire consequences of adultery and prostitution (Prov. 6: 25 - 7: 27; 22: 14) and the New Testament scriptures do the same (1 Cor. 6: 9-11).

Samson and Delilah. Samson was obviously besotted with Delilah who was cynically using him. It is too late to try and work out a moral position in the heat of temptation. Samson should have sorted out right from wrong before he had his head on Delilah's lap and so should we in relation to the very real temptations faced today. By way of contrast we thought of how Daniel and his friends resolved in their hearts not to defile themselves (Dan. 1: 8), and God honoured them. Clearly Samson's strength was not in the hair itself, which was but symbolic of the life he ought to have led. Since he broke all the rest of the special conditions throughout his life, we wondered why God placed such significance on his hair. Was it just a case of "the last straw"? Judges 16: 20 is one of the saddest verses because we are told that Samson did not realise that the Lord had left him. When he was very weak and exposed his enemies took advantage of him to the accompaniment of Delilah's mockery.

True Believer? Some say the recording of the fact that his hair began to grow as indicating that his faith grew too, otherwise it would be a rather obvious thing to report! Others could see no evidence of repentance even in his final prayer which seems to be just a cry for personal vengeance [Comment 8]. Yet Hebrews 11: 32 keeps calling us back from censorious verdict upon him. He must have been one of God's men and he must have exercised faith. But what did he achieve? Did he ever do anything right? He judged Israel for 20 years, drawing unmistakable attention to the Philistine menace and killing many of the enemies of God's people. In his death, which was one of self-sacrificing and not suicide, he achieved more than in all his life's work.

D. J. Webster

From Wishaw: It is highly significant that chapter 16 finishes in the same vein as the previous chapter. "He judged Israel twenty years", indicating that no progress was registered in Samson's life from the victory at Ramah Lehi (15: 17) to his death in the temple of the Philistines. This is somewhat remarkable especially when one considers the extent of the triumph enjoyed previously, yet such a triumph stands in sharp contrast to the failure experienced in chapter 16. It is significant to note that the Lord appears to be absent from Samson's reckoning until he is in the temple of Dagon. By that time, though, the damage has been done. He may have acknowledged verbally to Delilah that he was "a Nazirite unto God" from his mother's womb (v. 17) but his actions denied his words.

Samson's involvement with a prostitute (16: 1) suggests how susceptible he was to the appeal of the opposite sex. This culminated in his relationship with Delilah which contributed toward his downfall. The Philistines, eager to seize any opportunity to capture him, detected in Samson's association with Delilah the means whereby their aim could be achieved. It seems the rulers of the Philistines applied pressure on Delilah for her co-operation in the scheme to seize Samson by making her an offer she could not refuse. The terms being agreed, all that was now required was the tactics to be employed by Delilah. The method she chose to employ was deception. The fact that Samson fell for it is a pointed commentary on how his spiritual life was faring because he ought to have been aware of what was going on. Perhaps he was, but the 'flesh' had gained the ascendancy causing him to ignore the clear indication of deception and conspiracy which caused him to suffer the loss of his identification and freedom, by compromising his separation. Samson had obviously lost his sense of separation for why should he be courting disaster in enemy territory when he knew that such a place was no place for a Nazirite, let alone a Judge of Israel [Comment 10]. Samson had lost the singleness of purpose that characterized the Nazirite and by so doing is aptly described as "a double minded man, unstable in all his ways"! (Jas. 1: 8).

Samson's spell in captivity ironically gave him the opportunity to reflect on what he had done. Did Samson in the prison repent of what he had done? The answer is uncertain, nevertheless, God in His mercy gave him the opportunity to exact revenge on his captors so that he killed more when he died than while he lived (16: 30). This is a picture of our old man being crucified with Christ (Rom. 6: 6) [Comment 9].

J. Shepka, T. Gray

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead): Delilah's name is usually said to mean "languishing". Contrary to popular belief the Scripture does not say that she was a Philistine, nor does it say she was a harlot. She lived in Israel, for the lords of the Philistines "came *up* unto her" (Judg. 16: 5) and it may be that the size of the bribe reflected the fact that her sympathies would not naturally be with the Philistines. However, there is no doubt that she played the Judas.

2. (Birkenhead): Samson's prayer itself makes it clear that his strength had departed during his captivity. Breaking free of his captors may not have got him very far without the use of his sight.

3. (Birmingham and Dulwich): We would suggest that the principal lesson to be learned from Judges 16: 1-3 derives from the fact that, despite his feat of strength, Samson did not reach Hebron, the place of fellowship. When the believer expends his energies on the lusts of the flesh he will not be fit to have fellowship with God.

I. E. P.

Samson is such an enigmatic character. In so many ways his life with all its inconsistencies stands in stark contrast to the life of Christ, yet in his exploits we can see foreshadowings.

Our Lord and Saviour entered into the territory of the enemy and came out again victorious. Sheol could not hold Him. He, "tore the bars away" as the hymn writer put it, capturing the imagery of this incident in the life of Samson. The Lord has ascended on high triumphant with the keys of Death and Hades (Rev. 1: 18).

J. K. D. J.

4. (Bolton and Leigh): But was Delilah not of Samson's nation? Sorek means "vineyard" and brings to mind Samson's disastrous earlier experience at Timnah (Judg. 14: 1-5). Given the nature of the Nazirite vow, what was he doing near such places?

5. (Bolton and Leigh): It is difficult to see much of a comparison between Samson's death and the Lord's death. Samson's death arose entirely from his own sin and his victory was graciously granted by the Lord in spite of all. Generally speaking, we suggest, the Lord's approval of the warring of His men of war may be seen in the fact that he allows them to die at peace in their homes and not on the battlefield.

LE. P.

There is validity in what our friends say, although there are strong contrasts also. Samson died with a prayer for vengeance on his lips. The Lord prayed for the forgiveness of those who treated Him so cruelly when He was being crucified.

J. K. D. J.

6. (Derby): No doubt this is true, but Samson's years were given to the cruel (Prov. 5: 9). We commend Prov. 5: 1-11 as a commentary on the final episodes of Samson's life.

7. (Derby): The prohibitions of the Nazirite are not to be divided into those that are moral and those that are not. Like so much of Old Testament precept, commands were given about natural things. Obedience to these commands was in itself a spiritual thing but when examined in the light of New Covenant teaching these commands may be found to illustrate matters of spiritual significance for our own day.

8. (Liverpool): The point is surely settled by the fact that the Lord answered the prayer. It is no doubt hard for us New Covenant people to put ourselves in Samson's place because he was, in his day, an instrument of divine vengeance upon the Philistines. Disciples are not so today. Then the Philistines' treatment of Samson did merit retribution and for a man in Samson's position, knowing that the Lord will ensure that men will reap what they sow, it would be natural for him to expect to be used by the Lord to punish the Philistines.

9. (Wishaw): Is the parable of Samson's life not the other way round? He inherited a separated position at his birth just as believers today are made holy in the blood of Christ at the new birth. Thereafter Samson was expected to maintain that separated position, but much of the record of his life is of his failure to do so. So believers today are to give diligence to maintain personal holiness by, amongst other things, crucifying daily, their old man, reckoning themselves to be dead unto sin and so on.

LE. P.

10. (Wishaw): Yes, from the sad record of Samson's life we take warning of the dangers of compromise. Sin, worldliness and lack of separation bring weakness and defeat. Samson's spiritual brinksmanship eventually had disastrous consequences. He, "became like any other man"; God had intended him to remain different.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ our lifestyle should be different from that of those around us whose portion is in this life.

J. K. D. J.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. From **Wishaw**: How did the judges 'judge' Israel?

The Judges were not part of the judicial system nor were they part of the elderhood. They were literally charismatic figures for the Holy Spirit came upon them as they were raised up to save Israel. Thereafter, the saviours were judges.

Help may be gleaned as to how they did this from the case of Deborah. She dwelt under her palm tree and the "children of Israel came up to her for judgement" (Judg. 4: 5). She judged the mind of the Lord and the performance of those in Israel; detected where they had fallen short and exhorted them to obey with all diligence the Lord's command.

In the role of the Judges, we suggest, may be seen a picture of an aspect of the work of the Lord amongst God's spiritual people today. He is the Saviour of the churches (Acts 20: 28) and, just as the Judges in Israel lived in different parts of Israel yet judged all Israel, so the Lord today walks in the midst of the churches. We commend a comparison of the Lord's work, outlined in Rev. 1-3, with the work of the Judges of old. To each church He begins with "I know" and ends with "he that hath an ear". So He judges what He sees in the light of His law.

We commend especially, "I counsel... I reprove and chasten... I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3: 18-20). Is this not akin to Barak's experience (Judg. 4: 6-9)? Are there not brethren and sisters today who have done exploits for God and whose judgement, in consequence, is sought out by the people? In this, too, we speak suggestively.

I. E. P.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8809

TO SERVE A LIVING AND TRUE GOD

The apostle Paul felt thankful because the Thessalonians had turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God. Also John, at the end of his first letter, wrote, "My little children, guard yourselves from idols".

A shocking feature of the narrative concerning Micah in Judges 17 is his evident insensitivity to that divine pattern for the service of God which had been revealed in the writings of Moses. After describing the successes of the judges, achieved by faith despite much weakness and adversity, the narrative now shows up sharply the poor spiritual condition of some of the people. Teaching and good leadership were inadequate where each man did that which was right in his own eyes. How should a Levite have to search to "find a place"? What mother in Israel should advocate the making of a graven and a molten image in one breath with her dedication to the Lord of silver restored by her wayward son? How would the Lord bless Micah because a Levite served as a priest for hire in a place other than the place of the Name, in Micah's place of idolatry in fact? Also, what Micah's heart treasured can be seen from his question, "What have I more" (18: 24)? Such words stand in contrast to those of David, "I have no good beyond Thee" (Ps. 16: 2). Micah's behaviour might indeed have been passable by the standards of the surrounding nations, but it represented a departure from divine principles. It was because of such idolatry that it was recorded of many kings of Israel that they did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.

While Micah's pursuit of the Danites seemed justified in the eyes of his neighbours, they were powerless to alter the course of events that overtook him. The man Micah was discarded by the tribe of Dan, while they in turn had taken on board his error.

The men of the tribe of Dan were slow to take possession of their inheritance. It is lamentably possible to delay in entering into the Lord's desire for us in terms of spiritual growth.

A lesson **can also be derived** from **the** people of Laish whom **the** Danites overwhelmed. They **had lived** without **taking** thought for **the defence of their** position. "Walk about Zion," said **the** psalmist, "**and** go round about **her**: Tell **the** towers thereof". It is noteworthy **that the purpose of marking the bulwarks of Zion was to tell it to the generation following** (Ps. 48: 12, 13).

E. A.

ISRAEL'S BESETTING SIN

The events related **in the** last five chapters of **the** book of Judges belong to **an early stage in** Israel's occupation of **the** land, **but** they give **us an insight into the** low spiritual **and** moral conditions **that** so often prevailed **during the** whole of **that** chequered period of Israel's history. **This has been already the subject of comment in** our introductory study in BS 8801 pp. 1, 2 and 7.

Idolatry **was the besetting sin** of Israel from **the time of the** Exodus to **the** Captivity. **The** congregation of Israel trembled **when** God thundered **His Law** from Mount Sinai. They heard **Him** say, "Thou shalt have none other gods before Me... Thou shalt not **make** unto **thee a** graven **image**... Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto **them**, nor serve **them**" (Ex. 20: 3-5), yet shortly afterwards, **when** Moses **was** on Mount Sinai communing **with** God, **and** receiving **the** tablets of stone on which **the Law** was inscribed, they **made a** golden calf **and** worshipped it. **In that** early lapse into idolatry there was **an attempt** to associate **the** worship of God **with** idolatrous worship (Ex. 32: 5). There is **a** similar incongruous association **seen in the** narrative under consideration in **Judges** chapter 17.

It is sad to find idolatrous worship **being** tolerated **in a** man's household **in** Israel, **and sadder still to find it being** embraced by **a** tribe **with** no voice **being heard** denouncing **it**, nor any person **taking** positive **steps to stamp** it out. **The** events recorded reveal **a** great ignorance of **the Law and its requirements and** confirm **the** truth of **the** statement **that, "There arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord"** (Judg. 2: 10). These events show how quickly **a** clear divinely given revelation **can** become distorted **in the** minds of men. **It** also reveals the lack of **a** firm **hand and** godly authority to deal **with such a** serious **departure from the** divine **pattern at that** period **in** Israel's history.

J. K. D. J.

MICAH AND THE DANITES (**Judges 17: 1 - 18: 31**)

From Aberdeen: The seventeenth chapter of Judges apparently takes place about twenty years after the death of Joshua (Newberry).

Micah means "Who is like Jehovah?" Yet this man did not live up to his name. The devotion which should have been given to Jehovah was sadly misplaced. It is tragic to read of how Micah "filled the hand" (AVM) of one of his sons to do priestly service before an idol instead of filling his hand in the service of God.

If we apply this lesson to ourselves we might ask ourselves whether we live up to our position as sons of God; as a holy nation, as worshippers in Spirit and truth, as those who have received gifts from the risen Christ! Even if we have had good experiences of God in our lives, in the past, we are exhorted to walk by that same rule whereunto we have already attained (Phil. 3: 16). Also we are to watch that we do not 'destroy'¹ the good things of the past by poor behaviour in the future (see 2 John v. 8).

We see how Micah's sin, no doubt influenced by his mother, spread to infect a Levite; thence to a whole tribe and thence to all the descendants of the tribe of Dan, such that this idol worship nullified a whole tribe's devotion to the house of God all the days in which God's house was in Shiloh. How people conduct their household affairs can have far-reaching effects in relation to God's house.

"Well", we say, "how could these Danites be so idolatrous"? Yet this same evil tendency remains a continual threat to each Christian. We know from experience how we get taken up with other things which crowd out God from our consciousness. We deny Him communion and full surrender because of our preoccupation with earthly things. If we doubt this then the words of the apostle John are recorded to remind us to beware of idolatry in our Christian experience.

"Dear children, guard yourselves from idols" (Newberry margin).

James Johnson

From Ajegunle: Since Micah reckoned it essential to have an ephod and teraphim in the priestly service, he was no doubt aware of what obtained in the house of God. Thus, he was misled in his actions and erred grievously in practising idolatry. The possibility of falling a prey to such seducing spirits is strongly emphasized in the New Testament (2 Tim. 4: 3-4; 1 Tim. 4: 1, 2, 7).

The element of self is very much in evidence throughout the whole account. Micah and the Levite were not content to be associated with

the house of God. The Levite in particular, could find nothing to give him satisfaction and contentment in Bethlehem (the house of bread). Though he was contented with Micah, this was only superficial and temporary. His restlessness soon returned. This showed the futility of self-centredness. No amount of things can satisfy a yearning soul. Apart from the Lord, there is no satisfaction. (Ps. 34: 8-10; 65: 4; Rom. 8: 5-8; Gal. 5: 16-17; Is. 57: 20-21).

We suggested that just because a thing appears to have been blessed by the Lord, this does not necessarily indicate His approval. The fact that the Levite's prophecy was fulfilled, does not nullify his guilt of being an idolater (2 Thes. 2: 9-12; 1 Jn. 4: 1). Similarly, in our own day and time, the authenticity of miracles is not ascertained mainly by their performance, but goes beyond that to whether they are consonant with divine revelation.

The Danites¹ involvement in this sin of idolatry is of a very grave nature. One would have expected them to have acted otherwise, considering their superior knowledge. But instead of rebuking Micah and his priest for their ungodly acts, they coveted the idols for their private use. The irresistible urge to gratify their desires, overshadowed the allegiance they owed to God. The lesson in this for us is very clear, God by right, should have the firstfruits of our lives. This, perhaps, is responsible for the exclusion of the tribe of Dan from the other tribes in Revelation 7: 4-8.

F. Ntido, G. Okwena

From Birkenhead: Chapters seventeen and eighteen of Judges are given as an appendix to the main section of the book, providing us with a valuable comment on the social, moral, and religious conditions of the period. We concluded that the event is not placed in strict chronological order, and should be considered against the background of Judges 1. We were also made aware of the declining moral standards, the limited understanding of the Mosaic law, and the social disorder which prevailed.

The anarchy of the time is attributed to the absence of any strong central authority: in those days Israel had no king (17: 6; 18: 1). Had Israel acknowledged the rule of God, they would not have found themselves in such a disorderly situation.

We are introduced to Micah as a man who had stolen a large amount from his mother. Upon hearing his mother's curse, however, Micah confessed his guilt and restored the money. Wishing to bring honour to God, Micah's mother overlooked his theft, and then suggested that he should use the money to make a carved image and a cast idol. Although she had acted from good intentions, Micah's mother had displayed

ignorance of the Mosaic law (Ex. 20: 4, 24). Even today there are many who wish to express their devotion, but who do so through idolatrous and meaningless customs.

Micah felt no shame at possessing such an item, for idolatry seems to have been widespread. The central sanctuary had been set up at Shiloh, and probably there were a few who continued to travel each year (1 Sam. 1: 3), but Micah made his shrine in a more convenient place - his own home.

Micah wished to impress God, but clearly misunderstood the Scriptures. His final wrongdoing was to consecrate his own son as a priest. After a short time, however, Micah entered into an agreement with an itinerant Levite, who was to replace his son. The Levites had been allocated certain cities for their personal use (Josh. 21), but this man was searching for a place to live, and was ready to enter into an arrangement with Micah. Perhaps this was because the people failed to provide material support for the priesthood [Comment 2].

J. D. Williams, A. E. Sands

From Birmingham: We felt it significant that at a time when there was no king in Israel "every man did that which was right in his own eyes". We can contrast this time with Joshua's. He gave that strong and necessary leadership that commanded the allegiance of the people to the Lord, not only during his lifetime, but for many years after his death (2: 7; see Prov. 11: 14).

What an odd mixture of God's pattern and man-made practice and superstition we have in Micah. He had a home of gods (17: 5), a blatant violation of God's law, yet as if to give his shrine some degree of legitimacy he employed a priest to engage in its service. Perhaps he knew his son was not of the priestly tribe and so he brought in the services of a wandering Levite, one of the priestly tribe, saying "Now know I that the Lord will do me good" (v. 13). This is reminiscent of prominent parts of so-called Christendom today. We see Micah's shrine as where God's pattern is adulterated with what seems right in man's eyes.

The apparent aimless wandering of the Levite seems to be in keeping with the looseness of Micah: "I go to sojourn where I may find a place" (v. 9). One would get the feeling that he too was acting in a way contrary to the divine requirements instead of looking to the place where God had put His Name (see Deut. 12: 5). Each man was setting up his own altar it seems, and firstly we see it in Micah, and later in the tribe of Dan (18: 19).

The Danites searched out a place for an inheritance and five of them reconnoitred Laish, a city at the extreme northern border of Israel. They later renamed it Dan. There are clear and salutary lessons as we learn

of this city's situation. "They dwelt in security" (v. 7) (AV. "they dwelt careless") and "quiet and secure" (v. 7) (NIV "unsuspecting and secure"). The AV and NIV reveal the true state of affairs. They were a people living in safety, at ease with themselves and the world, content in their own prosperity, and, not being bent on conquest themselves, they trusted that others would likewise leave them in peace. The term "secure" which literally means 'trusting', is here almost equivalent to "careless", since the people should have been on their guard against thieves. They lived a peaceable life, probably engaged in farming and cattle-raising, and since the land was rich their prosperity increased. The Sidonians lived too far away to come to their aid, and the citizens of Laish had no ties with any other nation. In other words although they were without enemies, they also had no friends, and their city was completely unprotected.

"The children of Dan came unto Laish, unto a people quiet and secure, and smote them with the edge of the sword;... And there was no deliverer" (vv. 27-28).

In relation to evil it is required of the people of God that they be "simple" (AV harmless Rom. 16: 19) but in the midst of wolves be as "wise as serpents" (Mat. 10: 16). The people of Laish were naive in relation to potential enemies. We might consider further the words of the Lord Jesus to the church in Sardis, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee". For whatever reason the work of God remained unfulfilled and the affluence of the Laodiceans had lulled them to lukewarmness. The enemy's presence is stayed by watchfulness. "Be on your guard" (1 Cor. 16: 13 NIV) needs to be the constant attitude of those who will not be ignorant of his devices (see 1 Thes. 5: 6-7; Col. 4: 2).

R. Woods

From Bolton and Leigh: The focal point of these two chapters, and which has been part of our consideration throughout the book of Judges, is found in 17: 6, i. e. "every man did that which was right in his own eyes", indicating the depth of sin into which Israel had fallen, whereby so much contained in the Commandments of Exodus 20 was transgressed. These chapters appear not to be in chronological order but are rather as a kind of appendix to emphasize the state of apostasy in Israel. Joshua had warned (Josh. 24: 19, 20, 31 and Judg. 2: 6-10) against forsaking the Lord and serving other gods; so Israel, "served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua". Thus these events took place after the death of Joshua, verse 1 of chapter 18 showing that there was no authority either individually or collectively.

Micah robbed his mother, then returned the money (perhaps in fear because of his mother's curse), which was then used for idolatry. Less than a fifth part was used for this purpose. Was it a true statement that she had dedicated this money in the first place to the Lord [Comment 1]? Dedicated seems to imply being hallowed, separated to God, whereas her attitude could be taken as "that will do" or "that is good enough".

It began with a graven image, a molten image and then a house of gods. These images were worshipped while the house of God was in Shiloh, the place of true worship. Gideon also made an Ephod and it became a snare to his house. God is a very jealous God, jealous of His Name, Person, Glory and Majesty (see also Is. 40: 18-25; 46: 5-7).

In the present dispensation we are warned against idolatry. Anything detracting from the loyalty belonging to God alone, that takes the place of God or His Word in our hearts or lives can become an idol. There is a dual side to idolatry, in that it can be outward, such as paying homage to objects, material or artificial (as in the case of Micah) or inward such as the love of riches, honour and pleasures of the world. Against these we are exhorted in 1 John 5: 21, "Guard yourselves from idols" and in Colossians 3: 2, "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth".

Micah was in a state of confusion, knowing only part of God's law and commandments. He made a priest for himself, one of his sons, then, thinking to improve matters, a Levite. "Surely God will do me good seeing I have a Levite for my priest?" He expected God to honour him when he had totally forsaken the true God and done contrary to the will and law of God. "Them that honour Me, I will honour and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 2: 30) [Comment 3].

Chapter 18 deals with the conquest of Laish by the Danites. This is also recorded in Joshua 19. The Levite, having been seduced by Micah, was lured away by the Danites, proving his unfaithfulness to Micah when offered a position of leadership by the covetous and idolatrous Danites. Recognising the voice of the Levite, the Danites persuaded him to join with them, taking with them the idols of Micah: again robbery precedes idolatry. It would appear that the Levite made a false statement when he intimated that he had been in touch with God and asked counsel of Him. Here we have a wailing Micah "Ye have taken away my gods which I have made and the priest and are gone away and what have I more?" There was no comfort from either.

W. Paterson, (Jnr).

From Derby: This narrative forms a supplement to the book of Judges. As Moses¹ grandson is mentioned it probably took place shortly after the death of Joshua. It is largely an account of the acquisition of territory by the Danites.

Micah stole a large amount of silver but confessed his guilt after hearing his mother's curse. She was pleased he had admitted to his wrongdoing and said she would consecrate the money to the Lord. So a commendable start was made but not maintained. The second commandment was broken. It may be this was deliberate or perhaps it was done in ignorance because the priests had become careless in their teaching. They did not turn aside from God but worshipped Him in a way which was contrary to His expressed command and abominable to Him. Micah gave the priest's office to his own son who was not a Levite. The ephod may have been a portable object used in divining or a priestly garment. Thus Micah did what was right in his own eyes and there was no godly leader to guide him.

The young Levite, Moses¹ grandson, did not dwell in a Levitical city. He was looking for a means of support when he came to Micah who welcomed him, thinking that now that he had an actual Levite for a priest the Lord would do him good, although he must have known that Shiloh was the place which God had chosen for His worship [see Comments 2 and 3],

The Danites had not been able to conquer the territory assigned to them. Their strength had greatly declined since the time when they had been in the wilderness; so they sent out five spies to find some new territory. These spies were probably attracted to Micah's house, as it was a new centre of worship, and they appeared to know Jonathan, or at least his accent. They had no hesitation in asking him to inquire of God for them and he responded with a favourable reply. They went to Laish and unlike the ten faithless spies that Moses had sent out, these five, basing their confidence upon his grandson's words, returned to their own people and urged them to go up and conquer the land. Encouraged by their enthusiasm a proportion of the tribe took their possessions and set out to defeat the inhabitants and dwell in their new land. They went to Micah's house and while the priest was kept talking at the gate the five spies went in and removed all the articles for worship. Jonathan became alarmed when he saw what they were doing but they told him to hold his peace and go with them. Far from putting up any resistance to the theft, "his heart was glad" and his ego bolstered as he journeyed away from his benefactor, Micah, without a backward glance.

The Lord clearly states in Deut. 12: 5 that the people had to go to the place "which the Lord your God shall choose" when they came into the land. We must take care that we do not do what is right in our own eyes and for-

sake the way God has marked out for us. It is also interesting to note that Dan is not mentioned among the elected tribes of Revelation 7.

G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: In these concluding chapters we have the darkest shade of the book of Judges. On four occasions we have one or both of the expressions "in those days there was no king in Israel", "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" quoted (Judges 17: 6; 18: 1; 19: 1; 21: 25) yet in the judgement of the Benjamites we have a collective consciousness and action against evil. Not because of being without a king did such anarchy exist, for God was their King; but their failure was to appreciate this fact - that all their blessing was in their obedience to the law of God and not in self-righteousness (Deut. 28: 1-14).

Judges 17: 6 would almost suggest that the writer lived in a period of the kings when law and stability were more prevalent.

The usage of the word Elohim in Judges 17: 5 would be different from its use in Genesis chapter 1, for in Micah's house we have not only graven and molten images, but Teraphim ("household gods" NIV).

It does not seem clear whether the young man was of the tribe of Judah or of Levi (Judg. 17: 7) [see answer to question 2]. The ephod completed this peculiar priestly service. What is remarkable is that this false shrine should come into being so near to the Tabernacle service at Shiloh. This seemingly alternative shrine was erected despite what happened to Korah for such presumption. It could not be classified in any form as a sincere error, and would belie the words of Micah in Judges 17: 13.

The self-righteous anarchy stated in Judges 17: 6 was certainly the condition of things that led to the incredible violation of the law done in the name of Jehovah (Ex. 20: 4; Deut. 5: 8; 27: 15).

In Judges 18 the house of gods (17: 5) becomes the sanctuary of the tribe of Dan, and is set up by Jonathan — the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh and his sons (Judg. 18: 30). This also was in the days that the house of God was at Shiloh (Judg. 18: 31). Not only had Dan become the seat of this corruptibility (Rom. 1: 23) but the spirit of zeal which characterized the tribes in Joshua 22 would seem to have evaporated. If the happenings of this idolatry followed from Judges 2: 17 this tribal anarchy existed at an early period — possibly to that of the Judges.

It seems remarkable that this listless disposition also characterized the men of Laish (Judg. 18: 7), which led at least in part to their destruction.

flow noteworthy it is that such widespread evil should originate from one man and his mother (Judg. 17: 1-5). We are reminded of the words of Paul, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5: 6).

W. Townsend

From Liverpool: These last five chapters are not in chronological order. For Phinehas who was the grandson of Aaron was very active at this period. The Judges from Othniel to Eli covered some three hundred years. It would seem therefore that these events took place shortly after the death of Joshua. If we accept the dates in some Bibles it would be about twenty years after the death of Joshua. So in these chapters we have some events which happened as in the story of Ruth in the days when the judges ruled (Ruth 1: 1), but we do not know in which judge's days. We see here in the chapters before us their lapse into idolatry. This is in keeping with Judges 2: 11-17. When the judges died they returned and corrupted themselves, following other gods to serve them (Judg. 2: 18-19). Here in chapter 17 we see the son and mother quarrelling. The son robbed his mother and the mother cursed whoever it was who did this. He, perhaps being afraid of the curse, confessed and they were reconciled. Outward losses drive saints to prayer, but drive the wicked to curses.

The Silver turned into a god. They agreed to this, but although the silver was professedly dedicated to the Lord, less than one fifth was given to make the idol. In this way idolatry was introduced into this home. This was clearly against the second commandment (Ex. 20: 4, 5). The Septuagint has in v. 5^T a house of God'. In his mind it was as good as the house in Shiloh. He imitated Aaron and made an Ephod. We see in these chapters how quickly idolatry spreads, every man doing that which was right in his own eyes (v. 6).

The Danites (Chapter 18): This priest made the Danites believe he had an oracle from God (vv. 5, 6). They seemingly knew this young man (v. 3). When they came back from the raid they took the idolatrous things from Micah's house and compelled the young man to go with them to be their priest. Micah could do nothing about this for they were too strong for him. Idolatry became rife in the tribe of Dan. Graven images were set up and priests were made and this idolatrous worship continued the whole time the house of God was in Shiloh. The lesson to be learned is this, that we just cannot worship God in any way of our own choosing.

G. S. Webster

From **Wishaw:** From the very outset of this account it is evident that matters were far from right for the people of God. Micah secretly stole money from his mother; she uttered a curse supposedly on the thief. Micah for some reason returned the money, and his mother sought a reversal of the curse to a blessing.

The fact of Micah's mother paying two hundred pieces of silver for idolatrous gods, showed the sad state of many of the Lord's people. It is even sadder when we consider that they felt Micah's house was a house of God (RVM). Down through man's chequered history the same sad story has repeated itself: men have 'engineered' their own gods, and have deluded themselves that in the worship of these false deities they have been worshipping the true God of heaven and earth.

By having his own house of gods and by consecrating one of his sons to be his priest it shows how true was the statement in verse 6, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes". This matter of self-will is made the more stark in the light of the fact that all this time the house of God was in Shiloh.

The tribe of Dan appear to have been slow to inherit their promised portion. The five spies who returned said to their brethren, "Are ye still? be not slothful to go and to enter in". In Hebrews 6: 12 we read "... be not sluggish... ". It is for our good that God wishes us to press on and enjoy His rich promises.

Six hundred men of war set out from Zorah of the tribe of Dan to take the good land at Laish. They came first to the house of Micah. They easily persuaded the Levite to join them, rather than remain with a single house. Then they made off with Micah's idolatrous things. He came with his neighbours; but they had no chance against the six hundred men. How pathetic is Micah's confession, "Ye have taken away my gods,... and the priest,... what have I more" (Judg. 18: 24).

So far as the people of Laish are concerned things are said about them from which some lessons can be drawn. They were: quiet and secure; without any possessing authority; independent; far from the Zidonians; having no dealings with any man. Many individuals and groups seek to follow a similar philosophy. They like to have the freedom to do as they wish, and not to be "tied up" with others. Some describe this as "autonomy" and feel there is a strength in this. However, when real trouble came, they were totally incapable of uniting with others to stand against the "foe".

M. D. Bentham, M. D. Macdonald

COMMENTS

1. (Bolton and Leigh): The RV prefers the reading "I verily dedicate". This would imply that it was the restored money which she dedicated. We are not told whether the outstanding 900 pieces were used to finance the establishment and upkeep of the house of gods and the payment of the priest. The entire dedication was made with a view to the graven and molten images, and this might not have been confined to the work of **the** founder.

E. A.

2. (Birkenhead): It is very probable that the arrangements for the upkeep of priests and Levites would not be operating effectively at this period in Israel's history. That might be one of the reasons for the actions of the Levite in this narrative, but it does not justify him in consenting to practices clearly contrary to the Law of God of which he should have had special knowledge.

The Levites were scattered throughout the land and given certain specified cities, but it was the responsibility of the people to ensure that their needs were met (Deut. 12: 19). Priests and Levites had distinctive roles (see comment 3).

3. (Bolton and Leigh): The narrative reveals a lack of appreciation of divine requirements in relation to a number of matters. The priestly function was restricted to the family of Aaron and was to be exercised at the place of God's choice. The Levites were given to the priests to assist them in their service at the place of the Name, which at this point in time was Shiloh.

Priest and Levite, however, had also a teaching role to fulfil (Lev. 10: 11; Deut. 24: 8). The scattering of the priests and Levites in Israel should have facilitated the dissemination of God's Law among his people. One king, Jehoshaphat, at a later period in Israel's history realized the value of this teaching ministry of priests and Levites and ensured that it was being carried out (2 Chr. 17: 7-9).

J. K. D. J.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. From Bolton and **Leigh:** To which captivity does v. 30 refer?

Psalms 78 picks up significant points in Israel's experience, and in reference to God's anger at their idolatry refers to a captivity associated with the forsaking of Shiloh (Ps. 78: 60, 61).

The Philistines had been permitted to oppress Israel earlier e. g. Judges 13: 1, but in Samuel 4: 22 the very ark of God was taken.

2. From Wishaw: In chapter 17: 7 we read of "a young man... of the family of Judah, who was a Levite". How could a man from *Judah* be a *Levite*?

Bethlehem was not among the cities of Judah assigned to the Levites in Joshua 21: 16-19, but the Levite lived there. Bethlehem-Judah could be "of the family of Judah" in the sense that it was part of the inheritance of that tribe (see Micah 5: 2 and the use of the word "family" in 18: 2), and the Levite would be "of the family of Judah" in the sense that he was dwelling there.

E. A.

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Bible Studies

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EDITORIAL

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THERE WAS NO KING

The Levite in Judges 20 is described as the "husband of the woman that was murdered". The commandment of Exodus 20: 13 said, "Thou shalt do no murder". The whole train of events was disgraceful, particularly since the Levite had deliberately avoided lodging in Jebus.

The Spirit speaking through Jeremiah lamented, "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them" (Jer. 9: 2): yet judgement came upon Israel, for the Lord was chastening His people. In Judges 20 there is recorded an appalling loss of life in the tribe of Benjamin, and the price of folly in Israel, as the Lord's judgement took its course.

The oath they had, rashly perhaps, undertaken at Mizpah led to a crisis of conscience at the likelihood of losing the whole tribe of Benjamin. Jacob's sons, before they knew that Joseph was still alive, had felt their sin most keenly when faced with the prospect of losing their youngest brother Benjamin.

Again, Jeremiah could say (Jer. 8: 22), "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?" Israel's other dreadful oath brought about further bloodshed in a drastic attempt to heal the damage as they proceeded from evil to evil, and it was in Jabesh-Gilead that more lives were lost.

The expedient whereby wives were obtained for the remainder of Benjamin at Shiloh appears to have been adopted without any record of the divine will being sought in the matter.

The writer of the Judges was concerned to show the importance of doing that which is right in the eyes of the Lord, both in the first instance and in the hard path of correction and restoration, and thus acknowledging divine rule in their midst.

E. A.

ISRAEL AND THE BENJAMITES (Judges 19-21)

From Aberdeen: The Levite of chapter 19 chose to marry a concubine. In the light of the marriage laws relating to the Levites (Lev. 21: 14) there is a doubt as to the wisdom of this move. Also, the woman made a mistake in leaving him for four months. What about the father-in-law? Ought he to have hindered the couple's departure from his house [Comment 1]?

In any case out of a domestic situation involving personal decisions made by individuals there arose circumstances which led to an abominable sin being committed in Benjamin - which in turn led to a national upheaval, involving the loss of most of the tribe of Benjamin, as well as over 40, 000 Israelites.

It is apparently only about twenty years after Joshua died that homosexual men were found in Benjamin. Was this the influence of the nations who were left? Also there was no king in Israel, and there could be no possibility of godly rule and influence over the nation without a leader or king [Comment 2].

The tribe of Dan had turned to idolatry and these chapters show the outcome of departing from God. The Levite of chapter 18 wandered away from God's centre. However, the Levite of chapter 19, notwithstanding personal blemishes, remained true to God and to the divine centre. He called on God for guidance in dealing with the abomination which had manifested itself in Benjamin. That Levite, with the people, went to the house of God to seek counsel of the living God. They persevered until God sorted out the problem.

The huge loss of life which followed, particularly the wiping out of most of Benjamin, shows us the severity of God in contrast to His goodness. The leaven had to be purged out, lest the whole nation be affected. The nation would carry this memory for a while to come, especially the 600 who hid at the Rock of Rimmon for four months. The severity of God's judgement on His people at that time is an example of God as a consuming fire. He is not to be trifled with. We are told plainly in Hebrews that we are to worship Him with "reverence and awe" for our God is a consuming fire.

James Johnson

From Birkenhead: In earlier chapters of Judges much is recorded of Israel facing their enemies, and judges being raised up to bring about deliverance under God's hand. In this study we are faced with immorality within the nation and the appalling and far-reaching consequences of such behaviour.

From the starting point of the problem, a Levite and his concubine, the matter developed until it affected the whole nation. We were

reminded of parallel thoughts in the New Testament where problems within God's people needed action for the apostle declared "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5: 6). The Levite sought a reconciliation with his concubine who had played the harlot. Having achieved his objective, the enjoyment of hospitality was so protracted that their homeward journey was delayed substantially. Accompanied by their servant, the couple approached Gibeah of Benjamin as night fell. They decided to stay there and seek shelter amongst their own people, having totally rejected the servant's suggestion that they stop off at Jerusalem, a city of the Jebusites. We read that the travellers were shown hospitality, but those of the city proposed to work vile immoral acts. It is appalling to read that whilst the men's request for the Levite to be brought out for them was rejected, the Levite eventually condoned the rape of his concubine. She was dreadfully abused through the night hours and she died as a result of her experiences.

It is interesting to note the steps the tribes took when acting in judgement. They firstly challenged Benjamin. An opportunity for repentance and confession was thus given. But Benjamin would not listen (20: 13), and showed no remorse. They took up a position for war, and so were inevitably under judgement. Our minds were directed to similar principles outlined in the New Testament for God's people today which start with an endeavour to bring about repentance and move to a united judgement of the church if none is shown (Mat. 18). The battle against Benjamin was protracted and lives were lost. So in our day God's people may bear the marks of battle as they strive to preserve their character as a holy nation. Israel took their trouble to God at Bethel and were forced into a position of absolute dependence on God's leading before success was achieved.

The tribe of Benjamin was devastated, but not wiped out; mercy was shown. In Paul's letters to Corinth we saw that in the execution of judgement there was a longing that repentance and restoration would be the eventual outcome (1 Cor. 5: 1-5; 2 Cor. 2: 5-8) with days of spiritual prosperity returning for the individual who had sinned.

R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: Who would have imagined that such despicable vileness would afflict a tribe so near to the centre of God's land (19: 22)? Gross sins, associated with the heathen and which brought down the wrath and judgement of God (Gen. 19: 29; Rom. 1: 27) were now to be found in the midst of God's people. What does this tell us about ourselves and the potential of even the regenerate man to sink deep into the most murky practices of the unregenerate heathen? "Make not provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13: 14) and "the works of the flesh are... these " (see Gal. 5: 19-21) "of the which I forewarn you... that they which practise such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God".

"All the children of Israel went out and the congregation was assembled as one man... unto the Lord", and later "the chiefs of all the people... presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God" (Judg. 20: 1-2). In spite of a time of such apostasy the people were concerned that the wrong should be judged and put right. The elders played a prominent role.

We see this principle at work in Acts 15 when certain men taught a wrong thing (v. 1) and the matter was brought before the apostles and elders to discuss (v. 6). There was much questioning (v. 7), but ultimately it seemed good to them and the Holy Spirit (vv. 22, 25, 28) and word of their counsel was delivered to Antioch. There was much rejoicing (vv. 30-35) and peace was brought to a troubled situation (v. 24).

So in Judges the chiefs met, discussed and agreed a course of action (20: 9), but sadly it did not meet with a spirit of subjection on the part of Benjamin (v. 13) and civil war erupted with the slaying of thousands on either side. It was a time of great grief on both sides. Perhaps the counsel of God had not been sought. Eventually it was, and Benjamin was beaten (vv. 36, 48).

We see, too, in these incidents how sin can escalate from small beginnings involving, in this case, probably a wayward Levite, his wife, a tribe and then the nation.

R. Woods

From Bolton and Leigh: In considering the three chapters before us we noted that they began and ended with the comment by the author that "there was no king in Israel", and consequently men did that which was right in their own eyes (19: 1; 21: 25). This comment has also been made in previous chapters (17: 6; 18: 1). It would seem that the writer of the Judges is seeking to impress this fact upon his readers and that the events being narrated and their consequences are to be understood in light of the absence of visible rule and authority among God's people.

This background scene led us to believe that the events unfolded in chapters 19-21 resulted from men following their own counsels, and not seeking the mind of the Lord nor following the dictates of conscience. Although we are told in chapter 20: 18 that the people "asked counsel of God", it seemed to us that this was only an afterthought, as their main course of action had already been decided (20: 7-10) [Comment 3].

In chapter 19 the overall impression given is that of moral laxity among the people, which is the inevitable result of spiritual laxity as brought before us in chapters 17 and 18. In the incident of the brutal rape and murder of a woman, chapter 19 gives us a picture of the depravity of human nature when it has thrown off all spiritual and moral

restraints. As a result of this sinful act, the nation was to know much suffering and death. Perhaps this is an illustration of the disaster brought upon mankind by the sin of Adam.

We did not feel that the actions of the Levite were commendable [Surely an understatement - Eds]. His delay in departing from his father-in-law's house in order to indulge himself in pleasure was, we felt, a contributory factor in his arriving late at night in a strange city and thus in the ultimate death of his wife. Also the action of giving his wife over to the sons of Belial was motivated by self-preservation and lack of affection for his wife. We asked ourselves whether the Levite's action in summoning the tribes of Israel was the result of desire for justice or for revenge. It would seem to us that the motive was revenge, given the man's callous treatment of his wife's body and his former disregard for her safety. His course of action should have been to bring the matter to God and look to Him for justice and recompense.

Chapter 20 brings before us the terrible loss of life sustained in the conflict between Israel and Benjamin. We asked why this was allowed to happen, apparently with God's sanction. Our conclusion was that God was chastening the nation as a whole for the sad condition into which it had lapsed. It seemed to us that several factors played a part in bringing about this unnecessary slaughter. Firstly, although the people rightly wanted to see justice done, they went about it in the wrong way. Having listened to a biased and one-sided version of the events of the original crime (vv. 4-6) which was intended to incite them into action, they drew their conclusion and decided their course of action without seeking the counsel of the Lord (vv. 7-11). Only after they were committed to their decision did they seek God's mind at all (v. 18). We felt that the whole sad situation was compounded by the refusal of the Benjamites to deliver the criminals to justice and their immediate preparation for war.

The lesson from this chapter is that men may seek to do that which is right but, if they do not follow God's will in their methods, disaster will ensue.

In chapter 21 we see the full realization of the result of their ill-advised and hasty action being brought home to the children of Israel. Yet their question to the Lord (v. 3) would seem to indicate that they had still not learned the lesson of their original failure to seek God's counsel from the first. Foolishly sworn oaths taken before their action against Benjamin had left them in a dilemma as to what they would do to preserve the remnant of Benjamin. The result was more death, this time in Jabesh-Gilead and the dubious method of the abduction of the daughters of Shiloh. So the writer of the Judges pronounced, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" because there was no king in Israel. No framework of visible authority existed; therefore

the nation had fallen into confusion. How important it is that a framework of authority should exist among God's people today [Comment 2].

Alex Reid

From Derby: The opening and closing verses of this section seem to set the scene for one of the darkest and most evil episodes in the history of the children of Israel. This is aptly summed up in the words of Judges 19: 30, "There was no such deed done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt till this day".

There was no king in Israel. Lawlessness and a state of anarchy was much in evidence, leading inevitably to every vile deed of human depravity. The Levite having sought out the one who had been unfaithful to him, spoke kindly to her. Over the next few days there was feasting and making merry, and in spite of the father-in-law's entreaties to remain a little longer, on the fifth day he departed. The day was now far spent and they hurriedly made their way to Gibeah. It is sad to read of their plight as they sat in the street of the city, and no one took them in. Failure to offer hospitality, a sacred duty in the East, shows further how even standards of social etiquette had declined. When moral standards fall the accepted conventions of hospitality are no longer considered to be of any importance. It is perhaps significant to note that the old man who eventually took them in was of the hill country of Ephraim, although he lived in Gibeah. Being an old man he perhaps sought to retain the spirit of earlier days. He not only received them into his house but also made full provision for their needs. Once having welcomed the guests he took on responsibility for their safety and welfare.

As the assembled company were enjoying themselves, the house was surrounded by the men of Gibeah. It was a hostile mob, described as sons of Belial. Worthless men, bent on their own evil desires, their demands posed a dilemma for the host and a threat to his guests. He went out and remonstrated with them, "Do not so wickedly... do not this folly" (19: 23), but they paid no heed to his plea. In desperation, perhaps as being the lesser of two evils, he offered to bring out to them his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine. What followed can only be described as utter bestiality as the concubine was thrust out in their midst.

In considering this section, there are many questions that are left unanswered. Did the man offer his daughter to the mob in an effort to shock them into their senses? Or could it be that he was trying to prevent irregular sexual practice taking place? Was not the concubine a protected guest? One can only assume that what was done left no other alternative in an effort to try and control and calm the situation, and prevent other acts of violence being committed [Comment 4].

The Levite's apparent indifference in the morning to his concubine lying on the threshold of the door, portrays him as a very callous man

devoid of any spirit of compassion or feeling. It was noted that the events in Gibeah have similarities with the story in Genesis 19: 1-11. In that case God brought divine destruction on the city of Sodom. Now all Israel was called to meet the challenge, to be judge. There are possible links between the proposed action they were taking and the stern commandments of Deuteronomy 13: 14-15. "Inquire, and make search... if it be truth, and the thing certain that such abomination is wrought in the midst of thee; Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword" (v. 14) [Comment 5].

The earlier battles that followed, proved to be a disaster, and Benjamin twice repulsed their attacks. This was in spite of the fact that three times they inquired of the Lord (vv. 18, 23, 27). Having sought the Lord's will, how is it that they failed on the first two days? Was their approach wrong, for instead of asking whether they should go into battle, they asked which should go first? Could it be that Israel itself had to learn the lesson that this deed was done in their midst, for which they themselves must bear part of the responsibility. [See Question 2 and Comment 9].

In chapter 21 we see Benjamin restored. There was weeping in Bethel as they considered some of the consequences of their action. This was a time to reflect and repent, and associated with this were sacrifices and burnt offerings. Uppermost in their minds was the sad possibility that the tribe of Benjamin could become almost extinct within the Israel nation. The measures that they took to restore the situation were cruel and decisive. How could such action be warranted? The people of Jabesh in Gilead could rightly be seen as innocent victims, and the taking and carrying off of the daughters of Shiloh as immoral in the extreme [Comment 6]. The objective of providing wives for the children of Benjamin was achieved, but it is not easy to try and evaluate or justify the action taken.

A. G. Willis, G. W. Conway

From **Dulwich**: It seems a peculiar paradox that the prevailing condition of mind that existed at this time, of doing that which was right in their own eyes (Judg. 21: 25), should lead to such a dark blot hitherto unknown, (Judg, 19: 30), nor repeated in the history of Israel.

The character of this outrage is comprehensive: failure in the matter of hospitality, intrusion against the old man, who had given his house for hospitality and protection (Judg. 19: 22), violence with the intent of committing sodomy, sexual abuse, and adultery resulting in murder, sacrilege against a Levite, a holy one for the service of Jehovah, on his way to the house of God (Judg. 19: 18), and above all a high-handed defiance of the Law of God.

The status of the victim would seem to be one of a free-born wife in contrast to Hagar a bondswoman (Gen. 16: 3; Judg. 21: 10).

Though there seems to be no doubt that she was the Levite's wife, yet the words concubine and harlot are used [Comment 7]. The bond was one of affection: he spoke kindly 'to her heart' (Hebrew). That he should sacrifice her to save himself would hardly seem to be consistent with love, which is the fulfilment of the law. It also seems odd that the old man's daughter, though offered, did not share the same fate as the concubine.

The enormity of the crime is emphasized by the choice of the Levite to pass by Jebus (Judg. 19: 10) for Gibeah, and also by the fact that the old man, who was from Ephraim (Judg. 19: 16) was the one who showed hospitality.

The guilt for the tolerance of this heinous form of lawlessness falls heavily on the elders of Gibeah and the leaders of the tribe of Benjamin. Moreover the heavy casualties of the opponents would almost suggest a national responsibility.

The key of the book of Judges is contained in the function of the judges on behalf of Israel. They were men raised up to deliver them from their enemies, and to maintain the word of God. It is not remote in our own times, but is fulfilled in men who have the ability to teach and bridge the gap of the generations (2 Tim. 2: 2).

W. Townsend

From Liverpool: *Moral collapse* Having their historical setting in the early days of the Israelite conquest of Canaan (see 20: 28) when there was no earthly centre of government; there being no king and, apparently, no effective leadership from the elders of the tribes, perhaps even before the first of the Judges was raised up by God, these verses are a record of the neglect of the law of God, self-centredness, self-righteousness, aggression and utter hypocrisy as well as of moral perversion and wickedness. In probably less than a generation after the death of Joshua the people of God had managed to rear a nation who did not know the Lord or His commands.

The sin of the men of Gibeah The wicked men of the city were obviously practising homosexuality as well as being inhospitable, cruel and violent, perverted as regards all the normal graces and social considerations. The Scriptures make it clear that the practice of homosexuality is detestable to God (Lev. 20: 13), will surely bring judgement (Gen. 18 and 19; Rom. 1: 18-32), is unnatural (Rom. 1: 26-27) and is a sin that bars participants from the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6: 9-11).

The Levite We could not decide the marital status of the concubine [Comment 8]. Her father is called his father-in-law but she is not referred

to as a wife. Some felt that the Levite showed an innocence and a naivety about the prevailing conditions, and it is obvious that he would have been better either bestirring himself earlier or yielding to his father-in-law's familiar request. Most of us felt that his conduct was disgraceful, cowardly and devoid of pity (though some sought to justify it on the grounds of the cultural attitude to women) and we rejoiced at the higher standing that Christianity gives to women as equal partners in God's things.

The authorities The wrong having been reported it was the duty of the leaders of Benjamin to bring the guilty men to justice, a duty which they deliberately refused to fulfil. Perhaps it was from a misplaced feeling of tribal loyalty, or the guilty men may have been men of influence or even in positions of leadership. Whatever the cause, the moral state led to sin being condoned and treated as of no consequence.

The civil war The Israelites were right to take action against Benjamin and the outcome puzzled us. It seems they may have been acting out of a wrong motive, perhaps a vindictive attitude or it may be that they were arrogant and self-assured in their decision to take punitive action. If so then this is a lesson to leaders among God's people today. Sin must be dealt with, but not in a high-handed spirit of revenge. The third time it was different. The Lord had effectively chastened them and now they recognised their dependence upon Him, and showed their humility by fasting and bringing offerings. It was noted that the priest was involved and they were now going about it in God's way. Only in this condition did they receive assurance of victory.

Over zealous? We felt that, even in the final God-assured victorious battle, the Israelites went a lot further than was necessary, leaving the tribe of Benjamin all but extinct. With only 600 men left (all the women and children having been slaughtered) and their rashly made oaths coming back to haunt them, Israel was in a predicament. Instead of taking the matter to the Lord (perhaps a further indication of the lack of effective leadership) they decided on two dishonourable courses of action. First, they attacked Jabesh Gilead sparing only the unmarried girls. Then, as regards the daughters of Shiloh they kept the letter of their oath though conniving at breaking the spirit of it! [Comment 9].

D. J. Webster

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): The Levite sought a reconciliation and would do nothing to offend the father-in-law. Therefore when twice pressed with the words "Comfort thine heart", words such as were used by Abraham himself (Gen. 18: 45), he tarried. The father-in-law had rejoiced to meet him (v. 3), and regarding him with honour, was determined to entertain

him as long as he could. It was when the father-in-law changed his request "tarry ye until the day declineth" to reiterate the invitation "tarry all night", that the Levite insisted on leaving, although it was late.

The father-in-law assumed that the Levite was simply going home (19: 9) and never really intended them to set off in the evening.

The Levite, however, was concerned to go "to the house of the Lord" (v. 18), but he allowed his determination to please his wife's father to delay him beyond what was prudent. For five days they ate, drank, and were merry, but the sequel demonstrated among other things the importance of walking in wisdom.

„ A

Strictly speaking, Leviticus 21: 13-15 deals with the high priest and vv. 7-9 with the priests, there being no comparable commands concerning Levites. If the case of a concubine is the same as that of a wife, it may be that, had the Levite seen to the judgement demanded by Leviticus 20: 10, the sorry tale may never have unfolded. There is a certain symmetry about her end considering she started out by playing the harlot.

2. (Aberdeen and Bolton and Leigh): There was a framework of visible authority in Israel at this time which, as friends in Liverpool say, was prior to the raising up of the judges. What was wrong was that both leaders and people would not rise to their responsibilities to make it work. That framework, like the churches of God today, excluded a centralised government. The oft-repeated Scripture about there being no king and anarchic rule, which unites Judges 17-21, is written from the subsequent perspective where God permitted an earthly monarch with a centralised, tax-gathering government.

3. (Bolton and Leigh): It is true that there is no explicit reference to the counsel of the Lord being sought but the nation was assembled "unto the Lord" (20: 1). Furthermore, Joshua was rebuked for praying when he should have been judging Israel in a comparable situation (Josh. 7: 10). This is not to say that, even so, rash decisions were not made.

No decision to go into battle was made until Benjamin were given the opportunity to give an account of themselves. The original sin was bad enough but by their stubborn refusal to carry out the judgement of the Lord they put themselves into a position rather like the stubborn and rebellious son (Deut. 21: 18-21). The case is a most important illustration of the unity of the people of God in carrying out the judgement of the Lord. Just as churches of God today are not independent, self-governing bodies, so Districts are not independent and self-governing. If a District today will not judge one of its own then other Districts must do so.

4. (Derby): Is the answer to these questions not rather simpler? The concubine was sacrificed to save those in the house. She was deemed as

of least importance. Before we are swift to condemn, however, we might like to think how low we ourselves might stoop to save our own skins in situations where law and order has broken down completely.

5. (Derby): Yes, this is the major point to be compared with last month's subject. Had Deut. 13:12-18 been applied to Micah and the Danites the situation of Judges 19-21 might never have arisen. It is to the shame of the people, who were "assembled as one man" (Judg. 20: 1) and were "knit together as one man" (20: 11) to carry out the judgement of the Lord over a moral issue, that they could not bring themselves to do so over the far more important matter of the honour of God and the house of God.

L.E. P.

6. (Derby): The men of Jabesh-Gilead were not entirely innocent. Action against Gibeah had acquired the aspect of a sacred duty, which those of Jabesh-Gilead had not fulfilled. However, the action taken was ruthless and without divine approval, illustrating the lawlessness into which the nation had fallen.

7. (Dulwich): The expression "played the harlot" is not in the Septuagint, and does not appear in RSV. Does not the attitude of the Levite and the woman's father suggest that the breach between them was less than this, which should strictly have involved the death penalty?

P. L. H.

8. (Liverpool): The Levite is called her husband (Judg. 20: 4) but it is true that the Law of Moses is not explicit as to the marriage relations of concubines. Ex. 21: 7-11 show that a bondmaid might (but not necessarily) eventually be taken as a wife. After the manner of Bilhah (Gen. 35: 22) this may have been how such were commonly acquired. The Levite took a servant and a couple of asses on his journey, being evidently a man of substance. It might be that the concubine was originally a bond-maid.

9. (Liverpool): How could the men of Israel do other than fulfil their oath? In any case the men of Jabesh-Gilead were at fault. What part their wives played is not clear but in these and other matters of divine judgement we do well to heed the word of the Apostle (1 Tim. 5: 24), "Some men's sins are evident, going before unto judgement" (like the men of Gibeah or the Benjaminites); "and some men also they follow after" (like the thousands of Israel who fell or like the married women of Jabesh-Gilead) and will not be known till Judgement Day.

As regards the daughters of Shiloh, they did not have to get caught and the parents had power of veto. What happened here was that Israel boxed themselves into a corner by making some rash decisions. It took elaborate legal footwork to get them out of the dilemma which, as we have said, was largely of their own making. Perhaps the main lesson to be drawn from this is that where elaborate, not to say incredible, rescue operations have to be mounted, they may be traced back to poor decisions made by poor leadership.

... ..

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. From Aberdeen: Did the children of Israel inquire of God through Phinehas on the first two occasions?

When the children of Israel inquired of the Lord through Phinehas the words "or shall I cease" were included. It seems likely that Phinehas was not the one through whom they inquired on the first two occasions, and that they had not asked carefully enough to make clear whether the Lord would actually prosper their endeavour.

E. A.

2. From Aberdeen: Why did God permit the children of Israel to be defeated on the first two occasions? (Why did Israel lose such large numbers of men?)

Although the Israelites were zealous to avenge the behaviour of the Benjamites who were disregarding the atrocity at Gibeah, they themselves continued to overlook the matter of Micah and such associated idolatry. The result of the first two battles therefore did not reflect on the glory of the Lord, but on the honour of flesh and blood.

On the third occasion Phinehas was with them in their earnestness to seek the Lord's face, and doubtless prayed for Israel as sacrifice was offered. This time they went into battle knowing that the Lord had assured them of victory.

E. A.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8811

DWELL IN THE LAND

The events related in the book of Ruth are set within the period of the Judges, but the narrative was perhaps recorded in the time of David since his name is mentioned in the genealogy at the end of the book and the name of Solomon is not. The book records God's dealings in the lives of a particular family and especially with one individual, Ruth, brought from a pagan land right into the current of divine purpose. How wonderful are the ways of the God of love and grace! The land of Canaan was God's inheritance for His people and finds its counterpart in the spiritual inheritance we have in the Fellowship today. The family of Elimelech were brought into difficult circumstances because there was a famine in the land, but the remedy for them did not lie in leaving the place of God's choice and migrating to a foreign land. David, at a later time, and perhaps benefiting from his own experiences, gave sound advice to any experiencing difficulties:

Trust in the Lord, and do good: dwell in the land, and follow after faithfulness... the Lord upholdeth the righteous... and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied (Ps. 37: 3, 17, 19).

The existence of difficulties in the Fellowship does not provide a sound reason for leaving and going elsewhere although some have done so. Naomi's experience is a solemn reminder to any contemplating such a course of action that God's chastening may be severe.

Elimelech did not intend to stay in Moab, he only went to sojourn but he died there, and so did his two sons. Naomi did not hear God's voice in the death of her husband, but she and her sons became further entangled in Moab and stayed there ten years. It was only after the death of her two sons that she decided to return to Bethlehem. She recalled that she had gone out full - her action, and spoke of God as the One who brought her back empty. She was without a breadwinner, but when she came back to Bethlehem, the "house of bread", God provided for her through the instrumentality of Ruth, who had decided to return with her. That decision of Ruth's had far-reaching consequences.

J. K. D. J.

Note: Editors regret that papers from some contributors may have failed to reach them because of the postal strike. Special arrangements were made to ensure that at least some papers were available for publication.

DEPARTURE AND RETURN (Ruth 1: 1 - 2: 23)

From Aberdeen: It is probably significant that we read about the "field of Moab" (1: 1 RVM) (the field indicating the world, which the Christian is not of).

Naomi may have been the chief reason for the family moving to Moab [Comment 1]. She recognized that Jehovah's hand had gone forth against *her*. She said, "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty" (1: 21). God had dealt with Naomi as an individual. She had experienced chastening, yet in love the Lord had dealt with her that *He* might bring her home again, home to good things, which He had prepared for her and for others.

Ruth would look upon Orpah's back as the latter disappeared into the horizon of Moab. The name, Orpah, means "the back" or "declining" (Dr. Strong). Ruth knew that to go back with Orpah would mean returning to idolatry. Ruth had chosen to leave the "field" for the "land" of Judah (1: 7), where she could serve Naomi's God, the true God. According to Dr. Strong's concordance the name, Ruth, could mean "friend", "associate" or "additional one". She came home with Naomi as an additional one to the people of God - Naomi the Jew, and Ruth the Gentile. Other sheep are to be brought into the flock today. Gentiles are to be brought in from the "field".

The circumstances by which Ruth met Boaz were divinely planned. Ruth, however, knew nothing of that planning when she began to reap in that Judean field (2: 3), but as she looked back she would recognize the unseen hand of God in guiding her to that particular field. We also walk by faith; the future we cannot predict, but God overrules in all circumstances affecting our welfare. It is in looking back on our pathway that the hand of God becomes manifest. Naomi would look back as she nursed little Obed and recognize God's hand of correction and blessing in her life. It is so with every son whom God receives (Heb. 12: 6).

James Johnson

From Ajegunle: The famine in the land of Israel was a result of the sins of the people (1 King. 8: 35). Elimelech acted contrary to the law of God on separation by moving to the land of Moab (Ex. 19: 5; Num. 23: 9). Israel were a separated people, peculiar unto the Lord and that peculiarity should have been maintained.

We found it rather strange that Elimelech should leave Bethlehem, the "house of bread" to look for greener pastures elsewhere. In addition

to the famine in the land we suggested that there was also a spiritual famine in Elimelech's life. Elimelech, whose name means 'God is my King', did not live true to his name. God ought to have had the sovereign place in his life. The fact that there was something wrong in his life is reflected in the unusual names he gave to his two sons; Mahlon, meaning "careless" and Chilion, meaning "useless" [see Comment 10].

Israel was the place of God's Name and blessing, and circumstances could not suffice to make him take the personal decision of leaving. He left out of dissatisfaction, and to avoid God's discipline on His people (Deut. 28).

We noted that trouble comes when saints do not pay attention to the word of God. "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6: 7). This principle has been verified throughout the ages. Elimelech forsook God, His people and His house; God also forsook him. As a consequence his sons took for wives idol worshippers. He and his sons died in the land of Moab (Ruth 1: 3, 5; 1 Sam. 2: 30; Jer. 17: 13; Heb. 10: 26, 27; 6: 1-8). The warning is clear for anyone who contemplates leaving the house of God [Comment 2].

The point was strongly emphasized that the family took the decision to move out of the land (1:1), but it was the Lord who graciously brought Naomi back (1:21). This has always been the principle.

We considered at length the character of Ruth. She was determined to go with Naomi to the land of Israel and no amount of persuasion on the latter's part could dissuade her. We noted that her determination was not as a result of what she hoped to gain, in fact the prospect was not bright, but she was consumed by an overwhelming desire to be among Naomi's people (1:16, 17). Ruth was not in the least complacent. She sought for a blessing among God's people and lived to obtain it. The subjection of Ruth to her mother-in-law is seen in chapter 2:2. She asked for permission to go out to the fields and she worked diligently and brought back to Naomi the fruit of her labour. She had a self-effacing spirit (2:13). The requirement for enjoying God's blessings is obedience associated with His house.

It was suggested that Boaz (strength) is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. He made adequate provisions for Ruth, who was unworthy of the least of his kindness

F. Ntido, G. Okwena

From Birkenhead: The story of Ruth is set against the backdrop of moral and spiritual disorder which prevailed in the time of the judges. After our study of the Book of Judges it comes as a welcome contrast.

Throughout her history Israel was troubled by times of drought, and famines were not uncommon. This particular drought did not extend to

Moab, however, so Elimelech decided to move there for a short while, planning to return in due course. Leaving Bethlehem in a time of crisis and trial, he failed to trust in God; but God was able to use the situation nonetheless, and Naomi was eventually blessed through the events that followed.

While Elimelech and his family were living in Moab, the two sons (Mahlon and Chilion) married Moabite women. Moabites were forbidden to enter the congregation to the tenth generation (Deut. 23: 3). It is worth noting, however, that the law concerned itself particularly with males, and moreover, did not prohibit marriage [Comment 3].

After the passage of ten years we find Naomi bereft of husband and children, with no more reason to remain in Moab. God had blessed Israel by bringing an end to the famine, and so she begins her journey homewards accompanied by Ruth and Orpah.

It seems that the author preferred to narrate by means of a dialogue for in verse 8 we discover the first of many conversations. Naomi invites her daughter-in-law to return home, praying that God will provide them with new homes and husbands. There would have been little work for the women, and so marriage was the only state that offered stability and security. Since they would be less likely to marry in Israel their future there was likely to be one of poverty and uncertainty.

Naomi reminds her "daughter" (v. 11) that she is too old for marriage; she has no prospect of a comfortable home and would be unable to bear sons as future husbands. She is referring to the marriage law in Deuteronomy 25: 5, 6 (see also Gen. 38). Even if she should remarry and bear sons Ruth and Orpah could not wait for those sons to grow up. There was therefore no reason for them to continue with her.

Eventually Orpah kisses her mother-in-law goodbye. Her action should not be deprecated, however, for she was after all showing obedience and submission [Comment 4]. At the same time, we must admire Ruth's deeper love and loyalty as she clings to Naomi. It seems that Ruth had learned much from Naomi about her God, for she expresses her faith in no uncertain terms.

The return of Naomi to Bethlehem arouses great excitement, and the question* is asked, "Is this Naomi?" Perhaps her bitter experiences had aged her features so she was no longer recognized. Naomi, however, accepts that such events are all within God's plan.

Chapter 2 offers a little insight into the life of the poor in ancient Palestine. When no other work was available a widow could earn a living by gleaning. The Law stated that a man must not reap the entire land during harvest time, nor pick up what remained after the reapers had finished

their work (Lev. 19: 9; 23: 22). If he forgot a sheaf and left it in a field he was forbidden to return for it (Deut. 24: 19). In this way God provided for the poor; they were permitted to follow the reapers, gleaning what they could.

Naomi and Ruth arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest, and so were able to get food immediately. Unwittingly, Ruth went to work in the field of Boaz, a relative of Elimelech's. Although Ruth did not know any of the people, nor who owned the land, God was working out His purpose and had led her to the field of Boaz. This truth can be seen in every generation as God works out His purpose in each individual's life.

Boaz appears as an upright citizen, a man of influence and integrity in the community. The greetings which pass between the workers and himself indicate a mutual feeling of concern and respect [Comment 5]. When he meets Ruth he addresses her affectionately as "my daughter" and takes steps to ensure that she will remain in his field. He tells Ruth to help herself to the reapers' supply of water whenever she is thirsty. Ruth was shown special favour and kindness far beyond that which was required by the Law, so Ruth gleaned more than she could ever expect to glean.

The study illustrates many important truths for our own day. As we consider the kindness of Boaz to Ruth the Moabitess we realize that we as Gentiles have also received blessings from God (Rom. 9: 23). As Ruth and Naomi were able to speak highly of Boaz so we are able to magnify the Name of the Lord (Eph. 1: 3-14). Just as Naomi and Ruth received blessings which were unmeasured and undeserved, as a result of the generosity of Boaz, so "of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace" (John 1: 16; Eph. 2: 4-9).

J. D. Williams

From Birmingham: The book of Ruth begins with the statement that, "in the days when the judges judged... there was a famine in the land" (1: 1). This may well describe the effect of the poor quality of their rule. When the leaders took the lead the people offered themselves willingly (Judg. 5: 2). The word "lead" seems to carry a wide range of meanings, one of which is "begin" or "beginning", that is, to perform the first part. So we could expect a people to reflect the activities and aspirations of their leaders.

Elimelech and Naomi left the land - a wrong move for which they paid dearly. It is often in times of spiritual famine that people get disillusioned and move on. In such circumstances tenacity and vision are called for, to see beyond the failures to God, and to His plan for His people. Bethlehem, the "house of bread", was in the land of Israel. The church of God is described as "God's tilled land" (1 Cor. 3: 9 RVM). It is an enclosed plot of land in which disciples are planted, and where God's ministers labour so that growth may be promoted and fruit produced for the pleasure of the

Husbandman. How sad if in a place of such potential there is a famine!

Taking a wider perspective on the book of Ruth most were agreed that it represents dispensationally God's dealings with the Jews, and the inclusion of the Gentiles in the blessings of God (2: 11-13). Naomi ('pleasant one') may represent the Jews, and married to Elimelech ('my God is King'), may speak of a faithful Jewish nation married to the Lord and enjoying His prosperity and blessing, as implied in the meaning of Bethlehem-Judah, the house of bread. The famine may speak of spiritual failure in the land, and the migration to Moab, a heathen nation, of the dispersion of the Jews throughout the nations of the world (Deut. 28: 63, 64). Mahlon ('sick') and Chilion ('pining') may represent the many troubles that befall the rejected nation scattered among the heathen nations. Naomi, returning to the land on hearing that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread, could represent dispersed Israel returning to the land (Is. 43: 5, 6). Ruth, a Moabitess, must represent the Gentile strangers. She shows a godly and humble spirit in seeking out the blessings of God (2: 2). We were "strangers from the covenants of the promise" (Eph. 2: 12), but now are no longer strangers, "but... fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2: 19) [Comment 6]. *R Wood*

From Bolton and Leigh: The opening verse of chapter 1 gives us a clue to the historical setting of the events in the book of Ruth, that is, "the days when the judges judged". As the days of the Judges were generally days of departure and failure among God's people, we felt that the book contained a rebuke for them as it reveals a picture of the personal faithfulness of a Gentile.

As a consequence of famine Elimelech took his family to sojourn in the land of Moab, thus abandoning the family heritage. We noted that in times of like trial both Abram (Gen. 12) and Isaac (Gen. 26) followed a similar course, which brought them into trials and difficulties [Comment 7]. These events teach us that, despite times of trial, disciples should not abandon the spiritual position that God has brought them into.

On considering the character of Naomi, we felt that she was a God-fearing woman even if somewhat unsure of God's will. We speculated as to whether she was in agreement with Elimelech in his mistaken move to Moab, or merely submitting to the authority of her husband in a move that she realized was wrong. She did, however, see her trials in the land of Moab as the chastening hand of the Lord upon her (1: 21). We felt that the main lesson in all this is that, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" and that "afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit" (Heb. 12: 6, 11). Out of deep trial and sorrow God often brings great blessing. In chapter 2: 20 Naomi seems to grasp the fact that God had a purpose of grace in what she and her daughter-in-law had endured. The blessing that God had in mind was that, through the union of Boaz and Ruth, Naomi's family were to become

the forebears of King David and thus of David's Greater Son (Ruth 4: 17; Mat. 1: 5, 16).

Boaz is presented to us in the book as a man of compassion and integrity, in strong contrast to the general character of the people in the days of the Judges. His character, actions, and position as the kinsman-redeemer present to us a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ruth's words to her mother-in-law (1: 16, 17) are among the most moving words in Scripture. Not only do they display affection for Naomi, but they also imply a knowledge of the God of Israel. We felt that this knowledge would most probably have been communicated to Ruth by Naomi. Ruth was determined to remain faithful not only to her mother-in-law, but also to her mother-in-law's people and God. These facts were noted by Boaz in his commendation of the Moabitess (2: 11, 12). Here indeed was a model of faithfulness in contrast to the unfaithfulness of Israel.

In the light of Deuteronomy 23: 3 and Nehemiah 13: 1, which forbid a Moabite entrance into the assembly of the Lord, why was Ruth allowed to be identified with God's people? Some suggested that she was a proselyte to the Hebrew faith and was therefore acceptable. We would be interested in other opinions on this point [Comment 8],

Alex Reid

From Dulwich: We would understand that the expression, "when the judges judged", would include the seventy-one years of servitude (Judg. 3: 8, 14; 4: 3; 6: 1; 10: 8) [Comment 9].

Though the word "sojourn" (Ruth 1: 1) might suggest it was only a temporary venture, it was in fact a departure of about ten years (1: 4) to a related yet hostile nation who, through Balaam, would have brought a curse upon Israel (Num. 22: 6).

The cause of such famines is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 28: 15-24 and pictured for us in the book of Judges (Judg. 6: 6). As the famine could have been lengthy and there was the probable weakness of Elimelech and his two sons (suggested by their early deaths) there was certainly a temptation to escape to the seemingly more attractive fields of Moab [Comment 10]. The answer to this seeming dilemma is contained in the prayer of Solomon; revival would follow repentance and a turning from their sin (2 Chron. 6: 26, 27).

That their decision was to go to the land of Moab, whose people were prevented from entering into Israel to the tenth generation because of their refusal to meet Israel with bread and water (Deut. 23: 3, 4) adds to the enormity of their choice [Comment 11]. Though the responsibility of the choice was Elimelech's, yet the burden of sorrow falls on Naomi, who becomes the central character of this chapter. She was convinced in her

own mind that it was the hand of Jehovah against her (1: 13); the Almighty (El-Shaddai) had dealt bitterly with her (1: 20).

If it was a matter of judgement on Elimelech and his two sons, the loss to Ruth may be considered as a severe form of discipline, or chastisement, with a view to ultimate blessing (Heb. 12: 6). This discipline and chastisement, and the good news of blessing (1: 6), were the means of Naomi's return to Israel again. Like the prodigal son she went out full and returned back empty. The road back was sad, but it led to ultimate blessing for Naomi and for Ruth the Moabitess.

Though Orpah and Ruth both wept sorely we see quite a contrast between them. Orpah was willing to return to her gods, but Ruth, who clave to her mother-in-law, confessed "thy God shall be my God". This confession would suggest that there was a godliness in the character of Naomi which had impressed itself on Ruth.

The word for "kinsman" in Ruth chapter 2 verse 1 *moda* "acquaintance" (Dr. Young) would signify a relative, and certainly not the nearest of kin (3: 12). This would seem to emphasize that the move on the part of Boaz was one of grace to Naomi of Israel and to Ruth of the Gentiles.

The characteristic of grace is also seen in the salutation of Boaz (2: 4) and is a pattern of approach for churches of God today (Rom. 16: 16; 1 Cor. 16: 20; 2 Cor. 13: 12; Phil. 4: 21; 1 Thes. 5: 26; 1 Pet. 5: 14).

W. Townsend

From Liverpool: *Setting.* The story of this book belongs to the time of the Judges, though there is nothing much in the story to link it to the dark and bloody stories in the book of Judges except, perhaps, if the famine is regarded as one of the punishments in the cycle of apostasy, punishment, repentance and salvation that we found in our study. Leviticus 26: 18-20 would indicate that famine is one of the ways God punished His people.

Departure to Moab. We asked ourselves if Elimelech ought to have left Israel, and if the move was blessed by God. On the purely human level it would be prudent for a man with responsibility for a wife and young family to take them to where there was food. But Elimelech and his wife were part of the people of God, whom God had brought into the land of Israel, and who had been separated to God from the nations around, and it must always be wrong to leave the place where God has brought you. Although the family may have been well fed in Moab they soon suffered from spiritual malnutrition, inevitable for a believer cut off from the things of God. We noted the intention to "sojourn in the country of Moab" (1: 1) - a plan not allowed in the overruling counsels of God, and the irony in the name of Bethlehem - "house of bread"! Although it would not have been easy, the proper response of Elimelech would have been to stay in his own town and leave himself and his family in the care of God. Most certainly the move was *not* blessed by God.

Orpah and Ruth. The people of Israel were forbidden to intermarry with foreigners including Moabites (see Deut. 23: 3-6; 1 Kin. 11: 1, 2; Ezra 9: 1, 2), and so Mahlon and Chilion did wrong in marrying Ruth and Orpah. The women however, did no wrong in marrying Israelite men [Comment 12], and no blame can be attached to Ruth for this. Clearly today it is God's will that marriage by His people should be "in the Lord", that is from among the people of God, and alliances of any kind with unbelievers are specifically condemned. We noted Ruth's acceptance among the people of Israel, and that she was motivated not primarily by her love for Naomi, but by her love for Namoi's God, which was in her case a superb act of faith. In her distress and exile Naomi must have been a witness to her God and faithfully told her daughters-in-law of the things of God. Her reluctance to allow Ruth to return with her may have been due in part to her knowledge of the attitude of racism which she knew to characterize her people as well as to her memories of the sorry state of the land [Comment 13]. Although we recognize the love and grace of God in bringing Ruth into Israel and giving her a place among His people we puzzled over the interpretation of Deuteronomy 23: 3, 4, a literal observance of which would have excluded Ruth. Some suggestions were:

1. The rule only referred to ten generations *from that time* and Ruth was more than ten generations after.
2. The rule applied only to the unconverted Moabite.
3. Ruth is simply an exception to this rule in the grace of God [Comment 14].

Gleaning. In chapter 2 we are introduced to the social security of that time. The Law instructed landowners to leave what the harvesters missed, and forbade harvesting right into the corners or edges of the fields (Lev. 19: 9, 10; 23: 22). It is distressing to the Lord when the poor go hungry while their neighbours keep what God has blessed them with to themselves. It is not wrong to have plenty, but it is wrong to neglect the poor (cf. Gal. 2: 10). Boaz, in fact, went beyond the requirements of the Law in his generosity and concern.

D. J. Webster

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): The statements in Ruth 1: 1, 2 seem to place the responsibility for the move on the shoulders of Elimelech, but see paragraph 3 in the paper from Bolton and Leigh for a consideration of the role of Naomi in this matter_

J.

K.

D.

J.

Surely the fact that Naomi found a place of repentance and Elimelech did not shows that he was mostly to blame? His forsaking of the dwelling-place of God was a sin unto death.

I. E. P.

2. (Ajegunle): The scriptures in Hebrews referred to by our friends had a special application to Hebrew believers who had been enlightened in relation to the better things of the spiritual house and yet wilfully and deliberately

went back to the material temple that God had forsaken and to its sacrifices and service. Elimelech must have known that he was wrong in acting as he did, and we may see an element of wilfulness in his actions for which he suffered under the chastening hand of God, but I would not charge him with deliberate wilful sin. He apparently hoped to return to the land of Israel at some later date, but it was not to be. His experience is a warning to us. It is the prerogative of God to grant repentance (2 Tim. 2: 25).

J. K. D. J.

Yes, Elimelech "fell away" and so exemplifies Heb. 6: 1-8 rather than Heb. 10: 26, 27.

3. (Birkenhead): Marriages with "the inhabitants of the land" (Ex. 34: 16; Deut. 7: 3) were forbidden and 1 Kings 11: 1, 2 and Neh. 13: 23-6 show the application of this Law to nations east of Jordan e. g. Ammon or Moab. See paper from Liverpool and Comment 12.

4. (Birkenhead): Obedience and submission, however, need to be subject to a greater law such as was taught by the Lord (Mat. 18: 18-22; 19: 29; Lk. 14: 26).

5. (Birkenhead): They also indicate mutual nearness to the Lord.

6. (Birmingham): This dispensational analogy falls on a number of grounds. First of all, Elimelech forsook his inheritance and was judged for it whereas Israel cast out the Lord, their Messiah, and were judged by being cast out of the land. Naomi and Ruth returned at the same time whereas Israel's return to the Lord will occur after the Gentiles have been brought in. Naomi repented and then returned to the land whereas Israel, in the future, will be brought back to the land for judgement before they repent. Ruth married Boaz after Naomi repented and returned whereas the marriage of the Lamb takes place prior to the Lord's return and Israel's repentance. It is safer, perhaps, to see in Naomi's instruction and leading of Ruth to the land something of the truth of the gospel being to the Jew first as far as the present dispensation is concerned. The same point is made by friends in Aberdeen. *I. E. P*

7. (Bolton and Leigh): Yes, Abraham found that leaving Canaan to sojourn in Egypt to escape the effects of famine involved him in other difficulties. It does seem that Isaac was intending to go down to Egypt in similar circumstances when he moved to Gerar, but a direct word from the Lord prevented him from doing so. He did encounter difficulties in Gerar, but he also knew the Lord's blessing when he sowed in the land (Gen. 26: 12).

8. (Bolton and Leigh): The existence of a divine embargo that barred Moabites from entering the assembly of the Lord until the tenth generation only serves to magnify the divine grace that was shown to Ruth. In the exercise of His divine prerogative God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex. 33: 19). Some authorities suggest that as the masculine form is used in Deuteronomy

23: 3 the law of exclusion applies specifically to males and the female proselytes could marry male Israelites as Ruth did. This is the view taken in the Birkenhead paper.

J. K. D. J.

The principle concerning the Lord's acceptance of the stranger may be drawn from Ex. 12: 43-45, where males are allowed participation in the Passover (no doubt representing their families) if they were circumcised. That is to say that they became debtors to keep the whole Law. It is easy to see how Ruth fulfilled this as she committed herself to God and God's people; she forsook her old way of life. Now the Lord knew she was to be the wife for Boaz. But Boaz was not to go outside Israel to seek her. First of all she must come in. This is a most important principle which is unchanged today for the people of God. Ere thoughts of courtship and marriage enter people's head, both parties should first of all have committed themselves as individuals to the service of God amongst His people in the Place of the Name.

/ . E. P.

9. (Dulwich): There are six periods of oppression recorded in the book of Judges. The 40 years' oppression by the Philistines (Judg. 13: 1) must also be taken into account although it ran concurrently with the 18 years' oppression by the Ammonites (Judg. 10: 7, 8). The former oppression affected those in the west and the latter affected the tribes east of the Jordan. The three years of Abimelech's usurpation might also be reckoned with the years of oppression so the total figure is greater than 71 years.

10. (Dulwich): The meanings assigned to the names Mahlon and Chilion by most authorities are "sickly" and "pining" respectively. These meanings may suggest the thought of physical weakness, but there is little doubt that they died under the chastening hand of God, a consideration taken into account later in your own paper.

J. K. D. J.

11. (Dulwich): A further reason for the exclusion of Moabites was that they had hired Balaam to curse Israel (Neh. 13: 2) to which friends in Dulwich refer earlier.

12. (Liverpool): This is an example of the adage "people in wrong places do wrong things". Such marriages were unclean as far as the separation of the people of God was concerned. Therefore, there was sin on the part of those with whom the holy seed was mingled (Ezra 7: 2). We hasten to add, however, that such marriages were not unclean in the sense of 1 Cor. 7: 14. What we need to distinguish is the difference between sin and culpability. The more enlightened partner must bear the greater punishment.

13. (Liverpool): Ruth 1: 11-15 state Naomi's reasons in which there is no suggestion of "racism" in the way in which the word is commonly used today.

14. (Liverpool): Yes, the scriptures contain exceptions "which prove the rule". For example, "all have sinned" (Rom. 3: 23), but the Lord Jesus is the

"exception Who proves the rule". Similarly, it is safest to regard Ruth as the exception to the rule concerning the Moabites. See also Comment 8.

LE. P.

GOVERNMENT AND KINGSHIP IN ISRAEL

Our study subject this year reviews the period in Israel's history when the Judges judged.

Israel's national history began under the leadership of Moses their God-given leader, chosen by God to lead them out of Egypt. It continued under the leadership of Joshua, who was chosen and fitted by God to lead them into their inheritance in Canaan. It is clear, however, that associated with these two leaders was an organized system of elders that functioned for the orderly administration of the affairs of the nation.

There were elders among the children of Israel in the land of Egypt before Israel's liberation from bondage. It was to them that Moses was sent to present his credentials. After the Exodus the elders of Israel were seen associated with Moses in the government of the people. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after hearing all the words of the Lord relating to the covenant that he desired to make with Israel he called for the elders of Israel and informed them of the Lord's words, and they spoke for the people (Ex. 19: 7, 8). Arrangements were also made for gatherings of the princes and leaders of Israel unto Moses as part of the on-going administrative arrangements (Num. 10: 4), as well as for gatherings of all the congregation, which were also legislated for (Num. 10: 3).

It would appear that these arrangements worked well during the lifetimes of Moses and Joshua, and that godly and effective government of the nation continued to be exercised in the days of the elders who had been contemporary with Joshua, but had outlived him. Thereafter there appears to have been a breakdown in good government in Israel. There are instances of the elders of Israel functioning to some extent in the days of the Judges, but effective co-ordination of the leadership roles was often lacking, and the area of influence exercised by the judges, even when they were raised up by God as leaders, did not always extend to all the tribes.

It was clearly God's intention that Israel should be a people that were peculiarly His and separate from the surrounding nations to be a holy nation subject to His rule and authority in a very special way.

J. K. D. J.

To be continued. D. V.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8812

DOING THINGS PROPERLY

The first sentence of the book of Ruth invites us to compare its contents with those of the preceding book of Judges. Overall, the book of Ruth is about a wife for Boaz and the establishment of the line of succession to David and, of course, to the Messiah. Overall, the closing chapters of the book of Judges are involved with the establishment, indeed the survival of the lineage of the Benjaminites.

The events in both cases involve men and women of Bethlehem and are concerned with restoration following failure. Such comparisons go some way to suggesting to us why the closing chapters of the book of Judges are placed out of their chronological context. The principal thing to emerge from a comparison of the two portions, however, is the contrast between them. Given a choice, we would surely say that we would rather have companied with the folk that people the book of Ruth than those of whom we read in Judges 17-21.

Yet the book of Ruth begins with famine and failure of which we read so much in the book of Judges. Wherein is the secret that leads to the triumphant scenes at the end of the book of Ruth, which are in such contrast to the confusion and questionable practices found at the close of the book of Judges? It surely lies in this: in the Judges "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" but, as friends in Liverpool say here, Boaz was one (and we may add, Naomi and Ruth too) "to do things properly". The events concerning the redemption are not simply a charming, rustic tale of peculiar local customs. They show humble saints of God, with no pretensions to be anything great in Israel, absolutely determined to be meticulous in carrying out the Law of the Lord. They were like the men of Micah 6: 8 and no wonder the conclusion was as in Proverbs 11: 10: "When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth"; unlike the clamour at the close of Judges: "When the wicked perisheth, there is shouting".

If we had only the example of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz we might think that these would suffice, but if ever there was a man "to do things properly" it was, and is, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Descendant of

Boaz. **If He kept the Law of the Lord meticulously and so enabled human failure and misery to be transformed into success and happiness we are surely to follow in His footsteps.** Now, today, **in the things of men,** there is widespread recognition of the weakness of **human legislation.** **Such** recognition lends support to **men, if it does not actually encourage them,** to seek ways round **the law or** to develop **their** own interpretation of **it** in order to **"make things work".** **In** its extreme form this has found expression **in the** well-known words, **"the law is an ass".** **Such** attitudes may easily **affect** the people of **God** and efforts **be made to get** around the commands of **the Lord.** The **latter,** however, are not **framed by men, but by God.** They can confidently **be followed in** meticulous detail, **and even when the end of a matter may not be in sight, faith may rest on the certainty that "doing things properly" will receive the reward of the Lord at the end of the day.**

I. E. P.

THE CLOSE OF THE BOOK

This issue brings to **an end** yet another volume of **Bible Studies.** **An** encouraging feature of this year's issues is **that there has been no falling off in the number of contributions during the latter part of the year.** Ploughing to **the end of the furrow** should characterize those **in the kingdom of God (Luke 9: 62).** **Readers, and editors, are grateful, and since we are dealing with divine truth, eternally grateful to those who have read, discussed and then given their "reasons in writing" for the benefit of us all.** **If we have not learned anything then it will be our own fault.** **We** turn, **God willing,** from **the labouring men and women of the book of Ruth to the serving ones and the Servant of the book of Mark.** **We will surely know something of the spiritual counterpart of the blessing that Ruth knew from the hand of Boaz as she progressed from gleaning ears of corn (Ruth 2: 2), to bundles (2: 16), to an ephah (2: 17) and finally to six measures (3: 15), the measure being an unspecified amount.** The amount increased as she got nearer to him. **So will what we get as we get nearer to Him in our study of the Word.**

Editors

REDEMPTION (**Ruth 3-4**)

From Aberdeen: Boaz had the right to redeem because of the fact that he was near of kin: it took a kinsman to redeem Ruth (together with the portion of land). Likewise, our Saviour had to become near of kin to mankind (by taking on humanity) in order to redeem mankind from sin. This is the great truth which emerges from the book of Ruth. Also, we see Boaz and Ruth his wife as fore-shadowings of Christ and His Bride (largely Gentile) even the Church which is His Body, appropriately called, in redemption language, "the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21: 9). Naomi the Jewess was not left out for Obed became to her a restorer of life. One day too, the Jews as a nation will know restoration to life through the cross work of Christ [Comment 1].

Ruth loved her mother-in-law. This was to Naomi an enrichment to her life beyond material riches. Naomi had undergone bitter experiences, but in the end the great Source of love had drawn her ever nearer to Himself and His divine love.

James Johnson

From Ajegunle: We started off by defining the term redemption as "buying back". This is in view of the fact that the person or thing to be bought is lost already. Certain paramount principles come out in the matter of redemption and some of these are seen in the life of Ruth.

It is important for the redeemed person to be aware of certain things. First and foremost, he must be conscious of the fact that he is in bondage. Ruth was conscious of her own unworthiness and hopelessness (3: 9). Ruth was fully aware of the fact that Boaz could redeem her: thus, she wasted no time in acting on Naomi's instructions to see him (3: 1-5). This shows that redemption is in a person and the redeemed should be willing to come to the redeemer (Eph. 1: 7; 1 Pet. 1: 18-19) [Comment 2]. Finally the redeemed must be submissive and obedient to the redeemer.

In the same vein, the redeemer must possess certain qualities. He must be a man of substance, that is, far wealthier than the redeemed (2: 1; 3: 1-2). He must also be a God-fearing man, one whose thoughts are in tune with God's (2: 4, 12; 3: 10). Also he must be a man of compassion. All these qualities were found in Boaz. But they are more clearly seen in the greater Boaz, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. He was rich (2 Cor. 8: 9), holy (Heb. 4: 15, 1 Pet. 1: 19; 3: 18) and compassionate

(Mark 6: 34). Yet of far more importance than the aforementioned is that he must be a kinsman. And so Christ had to become like one of us so that by His death, redemption could be ours (Heb. 2: 14-15).

Redemption is not to be done secretly. Boaz's action in calling witnesses to attest to what is being done shows that it is a public matter. Similarly, Christ was publicly crucified (Heb. 13: 12). The redeemer must be willing to pay the full price of the redeemed. There is no middle course in it: redemption must be complete or it is no redemption at all (Ruth 4: 4-6).

A considerable length of time was spent discussing the purpose and blessing of redemption. The primary purpose of the redemption was to perpetuate the name of the dead (4: 5, 9). This brought Boaz into great responsibilities. The dead man's widow, Naomi now came directly under his care. Our redemption has also induced life into our dead bodies (Eph. 2: 5; 2 Tim. 1: 10), and brought untold riches to us (1 Pet. 1: 4, Eph. 3: 8).

From Ruth 4: 11, we suggested that one of the benefits of redemption is that it brings the redeemed into a relationship with the house of God. Although it was said that the "house of Israel" cannot be categorically said to be the same as the house of God; yet we agreed that the principle underlying the people of God is still the same. Israel was a cluster in the purpose of God, and it was into this that Ruth, through wondrous mercy, was grafted in, becoming a part in the lineage of the Christ.

F. Nitido, G. Okwena

From Birkenhead: In chapters 3 and 4 of Ruth we see how all things are brought to a conclusion in accordance with God's will. The unfolding of events in which Boaz plays so large a part present us with many pictures of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ on our account.

Naomi is conscious that Ruth's situation is unsatisfactory and is concerned that Ruth should find rest (3: 1). Naomi is aware that God will complete His work and encourages Ruth to believe this (3: 18). David expressed this beautifully: "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me" (Ps. 138: 8).

Naomi was able to point to Boaz and instruct Ruth concerning those things which she should do. She was to wash, anoint and clothe herself. All three things are symbolic of those things which happen to the believer today because he is washed (1 Cor. 6: 11), anointed (1 John 2: 20) and clothed with an imputed righteousness [Comment 3],

The meeting with Boaz takes place at the threshing floor where there is separation of grain from chaff. In our case, the meeting with our Redeemer in the separated place, with a subject heart, and with willing obedience leads to fulness of blessing.

As Ruth was to find rest, so God's people today are able to enter into His rest (as outlined in Heb. 3) when they exercise faith. Naomi's counsel to Ruth was to respond gladly to Boaz's direction (3: 4), and Ruth through her humble submission, finds her place amongst those who "obtained promises" by faith (Heb. 11: 33).

Ruth, "a virtuous woman" (3: 11), casts herself upon Boaz with a submissive spirit, looking to him to meet her need. As with foretaste of that which was to follow, Boaz sends Ruth away with six measures of barley, typical of the blessing we receive from our Redeemer (John 1: 16). Ruth experienced these blessings in the secret place unknown to the world (3: 14), and the blessings of the believer today are experienced in similar circumstances.

An important responsibility of the near kinsman was to redeem the property of a poor relative and, if that relative was a childless widow, he was also obliged to marry her. In this way he would provide children for the deceased. The near kinsman of Naomi, however, was unable to perform his duties because he claimed such a move might well have endangered his own inheritance. Thus Boaz went to the gate of the city to resolve the matter. This was the place where affairs of the law were dealt with. Similarly our redemption was dealt with according to God's law. Isaiah 53: 11 points to a satisfaction in the completed work of Christ.

There was only one person who could act as Redeemer. Paul, in writing to the Romans (8: 3), contrasts the helplessness of the law with the salvation that is in Christ. The story of Ruth, which commences with bitterness and destitution, ends with blessings and riches. Romans 8: 32 gives a parallel situation for us.

Ruth was a Moabitess, an outsider welcomed into the place of privilege. She, like us, had no lawful claim to the place into which she was brought.

It is remarkable to notice that divine choice so operated that Ruth (and also Rahab), though not one of the nation of Israel is so blessed that she becomes part of the royal line of David and ultimately of Christ.

G. H. Roberts, R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: Naomi seeks rest (resting place RVM), a settled spot, a home, a place of rest for her daughter, Ruth. It suggests the rest of obedience "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me... and ye shall find rest" (Mat. 11: 28, 29) i. e. a rest *in* labour as against the rest *from* labour found in the earlier part of this verse, "Come unto me... and I will give you rest".

These events are taking place at the end of harvest and indicate some future time (see Mat. 13: 30-39). Boaz, a man of great wealth with many servants, is to be found in what we may feel is a humble task winnowing barley in the threshing floor (Ruth 3: 2). It takes on an altogether different perspective, however, when we consider whom Boaz prefigures. Is he not a type of our Lord Jesus Christ; "whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Mat. 3: 12) [Comment 4].

The typology appears weak in places but nevertheless contains distinctive shadows of future happenings. Ruth was no longer a Moabitish stranger, but one who is washed, anointed and clothed; (v. 3), Naomi commands her, and we are immediately caused to consider the threshing floor bought from Oman by David to build thereon an altar unto the Lord (1 Chron. 21: 22). To this place the Jews one day will seek to return (Jer. 16: 15; 24: 6-7).

However, she was not to make herself known to him until after he had done eating and drinking (v. 3) and his heart was merry (v. 7). Does this present the picture of a man satisfied with the work he had accomplished? Seed time and harvest are now past; the winnowing fan has accomplished its task and he has cause to rejoice in the goodness of Israel's God. Does his fulness and joy represent the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19: 7) after which the revelation of Himself to His people of old take place (see Rev. 19: 11-16; Zech. 14: 1-4; 12: 10) and at a time when He is least expected; "And it came to pass at midnight" (see Mk. 13: 33, 35)?

Though these times carry a conspicuous theme of trauma and great bloodshed, the reconciliation of Israel to their Kinsman-Redeemer is a great love-story too (Ezek. 16: 8). This may be prefigured in Ruth's request to Boaz "spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid" (v. 9).

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: A wonderful question opens chapter 3 - "Shall I not seek rest for thee?" In addressing ourselves to what was meant by "rest" or "resting place" (RVM), the illustration was given of a ship at sea being buffeted to and fro by every wind until it comes into the harbour and a state of rest (marriage). We thus came to the conclusion that Naomi had devised a plan which meant the redemption of her late husband's estate and the continuation of the family succession. Possibly more important was the reward to Ruth for her decision to serve God and her unselfish devotion to her mother-in-law; a reward which led to the happy settlement of Ruth in a Judean home in the short term, and in the longer term, to her being in the line of ancestry of the Messiah Himself.

We considered the two rests in Matthew 11: 28; one for the sinner - "come unto Me" and the other - "take My yoke upon you" and we felt that Ruth obtained both rests. Ruth implicitly follows her mother-in-law's instructions, firstly in washing (speaking of purity) then in anointing herself (giving the thought of sanctification) and then in wearing the best raiment (reminding us of righteousness). Finally, she shows obedience in word and action: "all that thou sayest I will do" (Ruth 3: 5).

Boaz was winnowing barley, a process that was undertaken after the grain had been threshed on the threshing floor. Boaz had eaten and drunk and thus, happy with the harvest all collected, lay down on a heap of corn. Why corn? Corn was harvested earlier than barley and so there could be a picture here of John the baptist going before the Kinsman-Redeemer [Comment 5].

Ruth was not to make herself known to Boaz, but to "Mark the place where he shall lie". Then, when all was quiet, she uncovered his feet and lay down at his feet. This, it was suggested, is a sign of subjection and modesty shown by eastern women. Further illustration of this can be seen in Paul (Saul as he was then) brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and Mary - "she has chosen the better part" - who sat at the feet of the Master Himself.

Boaz is disturbed at midnight. Why midnight? Was it the start of a new day? [Days in Israel started at sunset - Editors]. Clearly he was distressed to find a woman at his feet and asks who she is. "I am Ruth thine handmaid", she replied; "spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman" (Ruth 3: 3). Boaz knew that it was an honourable reason that Ruth had lain at his feet and was appealing to him to become her *go'el* and provide the protection due to her as the widow of his kinsman. We judged that Boaz was middle-aged and was flattered by this younger woman appealing to him for protection rather than seek the younger men [Comment 6]. There is, however, a nearer kinsman than Boaz and he must be given the opportunity to

perform his duty of a near kinsman (perhaps a brother of Elimelech and a nephew to Boaz). So Boaz promises to deal with the matter in the morning and Ruth lies down at his feet, but departs before any could know she had been to the threshing floor. She departs not empty handed but with six "measures" of barley. But why six measures? [Comment 7]. Whatever the amount it was clearly an earnest of his intentions as we also have in Ephesians 1: 14 "an earnest of our inheritance". We, too, will not go away empty-handed when we sit at the Master's feet. Boaz had to be prodded into his responsibility, but there never was such a need for the Lord to be prompted into action. The seventh measure we receive will be far greater than that which Ruth received in having Boaz for a husband.

The nearer kinsman could not fulfil his duty and the shoe was removed and handed over in front of the ten witnesses. Our near kinsman stepped right in. He became a man, and what a sacrifice of love!

W. Patterson, Jr.

From Derby: We have considered again the book of Ruth and thought that the Israelite should not have been in a different land or in union with a different people. Yet from this God, in His mercy and kindness, not only blessed Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, but also brought joy to the people, the women and blessing to all his people through David, and the world through the Lord, the Redeemer.

From the beginning the attitude of Boaz and Ruth embraced the truth of Leviticus 19: 34, "thou shalt love him (the stranger) as thyself". This is the only way we as ambassadors on behalf of Christ (2 Cor. 5: 20) can function in His service.

Boaz gave according to the law on gleaning, and then more and still more, both to Ruth the Moabitess and to Naomi. Ruth arose to return (1: 6), but in the end knew the kindness of the Lord (2: 20). Compare Luke 15: 11-32.

The passage under discussion was summed up under two parallel thoughts:

1. The redeemed people and the land united under the Lord in the Millennium [Comment 8].

2. Grace, faith, love brought redemption followed by marriage and may be applied to the redeemed of the present dispensation (1 Thes. 4: 16, 17).

Numbers 27: 8-12 gives no right for either Ruth or Naomi to own the land of Elimelech. As Naomi was too old and marriage to a Moabite was forbidden, so there could be no offspring. This land therefore belonged to the kinsman anyway and it is thus unclear as to how Naomi had the right to sell it [Comment 9],

The near-kinsman was willing to redeem the land, but was too concerned with his own things to consider Ruth so:

1. He missed being associated with the great 'prestige'¹ of David and the Lord Himself in His earthly lineage.
2. The Spirit of God leaves him nameless, symbolic of the spiritual loss of those who will not act in faith (Mat. 6: 21).

The law was satisfied, redemption was done and 'the name of the dead' would continue and not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate. Grace was proclaimed, too, since Boaz had Ruth the Moabitess to wife (Ruth 4: 9, 10).

Naomi understood the need for a place of rest. Any rest on this earth can only be temporary, and the Lord has for us those many mansions. For his earthly people (see Is. 4), there is the land He promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but ruled over by one born of the line of this Moabitess and at that time King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

S. Wymer

From Dulwich: Though the land of Israel was Israel's inheritance from God, it still belonged to Jehovah, and was not to be sold in perpetuity (Lev. 25: 23). Because of this liberty redemption was made possible (Lev. 25: 24).

Thus as the right of possession belonged to God, so also was the right of redemption. The price was paid by, and to Him (Ps. 49: 7, 15). We can understand the Tightness of the principle of redemption because all that Boaz had came from God. So it was right that Boaz was willing to bless others in the function of kinsman-redeemer. In contrast to this, *our* Kinsman-Redeemer needed no incentive. His eternal love was the source of the concept of eternal redemption (Heb. 9: 12).

In the words, "Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman" (Ruth 3: 9) we see not only the fact of redemption, but also atonement; redemption being the ground of atonement (Ex. 12: 13).

The words "selleth the parcel of land" (Ruth 4: 3) present a difficulty. Do they imply that Naomi had possession of the land, and if so, how does it fit in with the concept of kinsman-redeemer? [See Comment 9].

Deuteronomy 25: 5-10 shows that there was shame attached to the refusal to perform the responsibilities of a kinsman-redeemer, but the part that the widow takes in Deuteronomy is omitted in Ruth 4.

Whatever is implied in the word "mar", the fact that Boaz was prepared to mar his own inheritance would exhibit the principle of grace, also seen in Ruth being included in the genealogy of the Messiah in Matthew 1: 5. To Naomi (Jewess) and Ruth (Gentile) redemption is of grace (Rom. 11: 5, 6; Eph. 1: 7), but the blessing to the Gentiles came through the Jews (John 4: 22). W. Townsend

From Liverpool: *The Kinsman-Redeemer* As the plot moves on from the events surrounding the return of Naomi and Ruth we are introduced to the concept of the kinsman-redeemer (*Heb. go'el*) - a near relative charged with the duty of redeeming the property of the deceased and of maintaining his family line if he died childless. There are two issues involved here; firstly there was the law of property, and secondly the law relating to the family. In this way this book anticipates the coming of the great Kinsman-Redeemer, our Lord Jesus.

The Property No Israelite was absolute owner of his land; it all belonged to God, who was the ultimate Landowner and from whom they held it on trust. It followed, then, that the land could not be sold - only a kind of lease could be granted with an automatic right of redemption and, in any event, with a reversion to the original owner in the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25: 25-28). It is difficult to see clearly what the transaction was about, though it would appear that some property, originally belonging to Elimel-ech, had been sold and should now be redeemed and Naomi had the right of redemption. The statement of Boaz in 4: 3 that Naomi is selling it is a problem, unless it means that the land had reverted to her and in her poverty she is forced to sell. Even this does not completely explain the

problem because, if that were the case, the role of the kinsman-redeemer would not have to come into play at this point since the land could be redeemed at a later date [See Comment 9],

The Family The point here is much clearer. Mahlon had died childless and there is a duty on the next of kin ("brother" in Deut. 25: 5-10) to marry his widow and raise a child to carry on the dead man's name and inherit his property. That means that Obed would be reckoned as Mahlon's son, so why is he reckoned as belonging to the line of Boaz in 4: 18-22? [See Comment 111].

The Nearer Relative Perhaps Naomi knew that the unnamed relation would not do his duty so she went to Boaz instead. Boaz, however, being a man to do the thing properly, agreed to be the kinsman-redeemer only when the nearer relative declined to do so. Having seen in Boaz and Ruth a picture of Christ and the Church we wondered if this nearer relative who was interested in the land but not the family, provides a picture of Israel. We noted that in *Needed Truth* 1933 (pp. 134-135) it is suggested that he is a picture of the Law [Comment 10]. Certainly in his actions Boaz foreshadows the great Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, in taking outsiders who were unable to re-establish our position and uniting us with Himself. We were not sure in what way his acting as kinsman-redeemer would mar his inheritance or endanger his estate. Was it too much for him financially? Was he not prepared to take the risk of having only one son? Was he racially prejudiced? [Comment 11].

The Midnight Scene The book of Ruth introduces us to many of the old and perhaps parochial customs of this part of Israel, including the strange scheme that Naomi suggested to Ruth and which Ruth carried out. At first reading - even in modern English - this sounds not only curious but perhaps even immoral and unseemly. Such thoughts, apart from being unworthy, are to be rejected by the high tone of the book; the morality and virtue of both Boaz and Ruth are not in question and the idiomatic expression in 3: 9 is Ruth's proposal of marriage! Still Boaz is aware of the damage to reputations if rumours were to be spread and so he wisely took the precaution of sending Ruth home before it is light, but not empty-handed.

Naomi The story ends with Naomi in the full happiness of blessing. She who had known bitterness and the emptiness of bereavement now was secure under the provision of Boaz and had the joy of cradling her 'grandson' on her knee.

D. J. Webster

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): For reasons advanced in BS. 8810 p. 142, Comment 6, we do not think that we have in Naomi (or indeed Ruth) a picture of Israel's future restoration in the Millennium. This point is elaborated in Comment 3, below. Naomi and Ruth were jointly blessed and more accurately foreshadow the joint blessing of Jew and Gentile in the present dispensation.

2. (Ajegunle): We commend to readers the way in which friends in Ajegunle have used many New Testament scriptures to interpret the story of Ruth. We note that 1 Peter 1: 18-19 refers to the second, or present, aspect of redemption. Friends in Birkenhead refer to the redemption of a people who are to occupy the place of God's rest. This we may refer to as the third aspect of redemption. Most contributors refer to what we may call the first aspect of redemption, the redemption of the soul and friends in Birmingham, interpret the rest of Ruth 3: 1 with reference to the two rests of Matthew 11: 28, 29 which correspond to the first and second aspects of redemption. We suggest that all three may be seen in the story of Ruth.

3. (Birkenhead): The washing, anointing and clothing of Ruth cannot foreshadow those events which accompany salvation. First of all, Ruth performed them herself whereas the Lord performs the actions of 1 Corinthians 6: 11; 1 John 2: 20 and the imputing of righteousness upon the helpless sinner. Secondly, Ruth's preparation preceded her surrender to her Redeemer whereas the actions to which friends refer accompany salvation. If an explanation of Ruth's actions is to be sought we would suggest that it may be found in the sinner's submission to the action of the Word of God and the Spirit of God which leads him to change his habits when he prepares to meet the Saviour. Since Ruth had already committed herself to the way of the Lord, we doubt that her actions at the threshing floor foreshadow the believer's acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ.

4. (Birmingham): The interpretation of the events of Ruth's submission to Boaz in terms of Israel's future submission to the Lord falls down in that that event takes place *after* the marriage of the Lamb. Further it does not explain Ruth's marriage to Boaz since the Bride of Christ is not Israel as would be implied in such an interpretation. Finally, Ruth's preparation to meet Boaz was applied by herself whereas it is clear that Israel's preparation to meet the Lord when He comes to the earth will be by a process of severe judgement which still does not persuade them until they see the marks of Calvary.

5. (Bolton and Leigh): Corn is just the general name for such as wheat, barley and so on. The Hebrew word is more concerned with the idea of a "heap" of corn. See Ruth 2: 2, 16, 17.

6. (Bolton and Leigh): "Flattered" is not really the right word to describe the effects of the love that the Lord puts in the hearts of His saints for each other in the matter of courtship and marriage.

7. (Bolton and Leigh): It is commonly held that the six held forth the promise of the seventh just as much of what we possess now from the Lord holds forth the promise of future completion of blessing.

8. (Derby): We doubt if it is correct to apply these things to Israel in the Millennium. See Comments 1 and 4.

9. (Derby): Naomi still had to come to the point of decision that she would have to do these things. It is a demonstration of her faith, wisdom and ability to read the mind of the Lord that she directed Ruth along the course she took. After all, Boaz may have refused or the nearer kinsman taken up the offer.

10. (Liverpool): If the Lord is a Kinsman by being made in the likeness of man (Phil. 2: 7) then the nearer kinsman must surely be of the human race. Therefore we suggest the nearer kinsman is he of Psalm 49: 6-9.

11. (Liverpool): The Lord is no man's debtor. The inclusion of Boaz's name instead of Mahlon's shows that whatever he may have lost in Israel's history and record books, he more than gained in the Lord's record. In this we suggest he foreshadowed the ideal of discipleship to which the Lord referred (Mark 10: 29-31). Correspondingly, whatever the nearer kinsman thought was of value to him (and the Scripture does not say) was loss to him in the day of reckoning, just as his name is lost to the divine record.

I. E. P.

GOVERNMENT AND KINGSHIP IN ISRAEL (Cont, from p. 144)

Kingship is a divine concept. There was a throne and a King in heaven before there were thrones and kings on earth. God is the Eternal King (1 Tim. 1: 17). David showed that he appreciated this truth when he wrote:

"The Lord hath established His throne in the Heavens;
And His kingdom ruleth over all (Ps. 103: 19).
For God is the King of all the earth:...
God reigneth over the nations:
God sitteth upon His holy throne" (Ps. 47: 7, 8).

While **it is true that God in His overruling sovereignty exercises authority over the nations, "And none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, what doest Thou?" (Dan. 4: 35), His rule in Israel was to be more direct: they were to be a theocracy.** Gideon showed his appreciation **of this when he declined the offer of kingship made to him by the men of Israel.** He was **right in doing so.** The offer **made to him** was not merely **that he should be king, but that he should found a dynasty with his sons succeeding him upon the throne.** While Gideon **had no desires after kingship, one of his sons had.** Abimelech coveted **the position of authority that his father had declined.** His usurpation of **the kingship was, however, shortlived, and it is not clear how widespread his sphere of influence was.** The **divine record states that "Abimelech was prince over Israel three years" (Judg. 9: 22).**

Samuel **the prophet was the last of the line of Judges in Israel (Acts 13: 20). He had been greatly used by God to bring about a revival in Israel, but in his old age, he made his sons judges over Israel and they were not men like their father.** They took **bribes and perverted judgement.** This unsatisfactory state **of affairs prompted the elders of Israel to ask Samuel to make them a king (1 Sam. 8: 5). They wanted to be like the nations around them and a king to judge them and to fight their battles.** They forgot **that their greatness lay in the fact that they were different from other nations (Deut. 4: 5-8).** The request displeased **Samuel and when he took his burden to the Lord in prayer he was told to take notice of the wishes of the people, but to solemnly warn them of the way their lives would be affected by the establishment of a monarchy in Israel.** It was not **Samuel who was being rejected; it was the direct rule of God that was being rejected (1 Sam. 8: 7). In spite of Samuel's protestations the people persisted in their desire for a king and their request was granted.**

While the desire for a king indicated a departure from the divine ideal for Israel it was an eventuality that had been foreseen by God, and principles had been laid down as guidelines for their kings (Deut. 17: 14-20).

Saul, Israel's first king, satisfied the requirements of the people when he was presented to them. He began well doing many commendable things early in his reign, but later disobedience resulted in him being rejected by God although he continued in his kingship until his death on Mount Gilboa. David, who succeeded him, had been anointed as king by Samuel while Saul was still on the throne and after many trials became king over Judah at the time of Saul's death and seven years later over all Israel.

David was a man after God's own heart, and he set a standard of kingship that was used by God as a measuring rod for the kings who succeeded him. **David** recognised God as the true Ruler in Israel and regarded himself as God's viceroy.

After the monarchy was established in Israel the role of the king in relation to the spiritual well-being of the people was crucial. The spiritual condition of the nation depended largely on the spiritual condition of their ruler. David's exercise concerning the Ark of God contrasts starkly with Saul's lack of exercise in relation to it, "We sought not unto it in the days of Saul" (1 Chr. 13: 3). The high-water mark in Israel's collective service was reached in the days of Solomon, when that magnificent temple was built and the collective service associated with it was commenced. **David**, however, had been the man with the vision, and his preparatory work and zeal for God's house had made it all possible. The latter days of Solomon were sadly marred by associations with idolatry.

The spiritual climate in the kingdom of Judah in its subsequent history was determined by the spiritual condition of its kings. There were times of revival and spiritual prosperity when the occupants of the throne "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Chr. 24: 2), and periods of declension when they turned away from the Lord.

The monarchy in Judah ceased with the carrying away to Babylon, and Israel has been without a king ever since. The promise to **David** will, however, be fulfilled. Because of David's love for the house of God and his desire to build a house for God, the promise was made to him by God that:

"Thine house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7: 16).

That promise will be fulfilled through the One who is David's Son and David's Lord. The Lord Jesus was born King of the Jews; He was able to trace His human genealogy back to David (see Mat. 1: 6-16; also Luke 3: 23-31), but He was rejected by the rulers of the nation (Jn. 19: 15). That rejection had been predicted, although Scripture was fulfilled when He presented Himself to Israel in the manner prescribed by the prophet Zechariah (Mat. 21: 5; Zech. 9: 9), the prophetic writings were also fulfilled in His death. That death was essential to the fulfilment of eternal counsels that had in view the blessing of all men and nations. The promise given to Mary prior to the Saviour's birth was:

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end"
(Lk. 1: 32, 33).

It should be noted, however, that the message given to Joseph about the same time was:

"Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.
And she shall bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus; For it is He that shall save His people from their sins"
(Mat. 1: 20, 21).

He came to earth the first time to die, "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9: 26). When He comes the second time to earth He will come to reign. Then the word spoken to Mary will be fulfilled. The Lord Jesus Christ is God's King, whom He has set upon His holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2: 6), and He will yet show unto men who is "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6: 15).

Few would dispute that the best form of rule is one where authority is vested in one man, *if the right man can be found*. God has that Man in readiness, for absolute authority in the universe has been placed in the nail-pierced hands of the Man of Calvary, and the time is coming when He will exercise fully the authority that has been vested in Him. The words spoken by the heavenly voices will be fulfilled:

"The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11: 15).

The glorious thousand year reign of Christ on earth that will provide the climax to God's dealings with men on this earth was faintly prefigured in the reign of Solomon over Israel. It will demonstrate to men what a wonderful place this earth can be for men to live in when the right person is in direct overall control. It is worthy of note that David, whose rule approximated so closely to the divine ideal of kingship will have an honoured place in that Millennial reign as prince over Israel under the King of kings (Ezek. 34: 24; 37: 25). That thousand year reign, however, will be the prelude to the day of eternity and the state of eternal felicity that will be enjoyed by the redeemed on a new earth wherein righteousness dwells.

(2 Pet. 3: 13). J. K. D. J.