

THE BOOK OF THE JUDGES

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Introduction

The previous book began with the statement: "Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the LORD, it came to pass"; the book of Joshua is, therefore, closely linked with Deuteronomy. The book of Judges has for its opening word a similar announcement: "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass." Judges is, therefore, the book which contains Israel's history after the occupation of the promised land and the death of Joshua. It covers about 320 years, extending to the judgeship of Samuel. In Acts 13:20 we read: "And after that He gave them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet." This is a general statement and does not claim a chronological character. It is founded on the addition of the numbers mentioned in Judges. Some of these synchronize with others and must be deducted from the total.

"We find one express and clearly fixed chronological point in 1 Kings 6:1, according to which 480 years intervene between the departure out of Egypt, and the building of the temple, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign; after the necessary deductions have been made, about 320 years remain for the age of the judges. The chronological data in the book of Judges agree with this result, if the Ammonite oppression of the east-Jordanic territory (Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon) are assumed as contemporaneous with the Philistine oppression of the west-Jordanic territory (Eli, Samson, Samuel). In this case, Eli's priesthood preceded the term of Samson's labors; the first operations of Samuel (merely prophetic in their character), belong to Samson's term, and it was only after the death of the latter that he assumed the office of a judge. It may, indeed, appear a singular circumstance, that the book of Judges should not refer to Eli and Samuel, and that the two books of Samuel should not mention Samson, but both circumstances are readily and satisfactorily explained by the difference in the objects for which these books respectively were written. The books of Samuel design to relate the history of David, the necessary introduction of which is an account of Saul, Samuel, and Eli, the events of whose lives are interwoven with those which belong to the earlier years of David's career; and here no reference whatever to Samson was required. The book of Judges, on the other hand, relates nothing concerning Eli, because he was not a judge, in the peculiar sense of that word, but presided over public affairs merely in the capacity of a high-priest; and it related nothing concerning Samuel, since his later

acts, when he officiated as a judge, no longer belong to the period of Israel's repeated apostasy from Jehovah, which it is the design of this book to describe." (J.H. Kurtz, Sacred History)

The main part of the book of Judges is given to the sad history of Israel's departure from God, their chastisement and deliverance through the mercy and faithfulness of the Lord. The divinely given predictions through Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy, are now seen passing into history. Joshua's warning is being fulfilled. "Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of those nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your side, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD our God hath given you" (Josh. 23:13). The whole nation disintegrates. All goes to pieces. The whole sad story of decline is written in two statements, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the book. In the beginning of this book they asked the question of who is first to go up to fight the Canaanites (chapter 1:1). At the end they ask who is to battle against their own, to fight the children of Benjamin (20:18). They began in the Spirit and ended in the flesh. First, they fought the common foe, then they fought each other.

The book of Judges, therefore, records the complete failure of the people of God and the graciousness of the Lord. Perhaps nowhere else in the Word of God do we find the patience and faithfulness of Jehovah towards an unfaithful and backsliding people so fully made known as in Judges. The instruments Jehovah used were the judges. They were raised up by God in the days of declension to bring about deliverances from the enemies, who had been permitted to bring Israel into servitude. They were, therefore, more than what the word judge in our language denotes. They were prophets in action. Their persons show how God has chosen the weak things to accomplish His purposes. One was left-handed. Another used an ox-goad; still another pitchers and trumpets and one had for a weapon the jawbone of an ass. One was a woman. There were thirteen judges. Six declensions are clearly marked by the phrase that the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord (3:7, 12; 4:1; 10:6; 8:1). And these six main declensions resulted in corresponding punishments followed by gracious deliverances through the judges.

What is the value and meaning of this historical book? If it has no other object beyond acquainting us with Israel's history, a deeper study would indeed be useless.

Again we refer to that familiar New Testament word, which fully authorizes us to read these histories in their typical hearings. "Now all these things happened unto them as types; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). "For as many things as have been written before have been written for our instruction, that through endurance and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

We have learned from the study of the Pentateuch, especially from the history of Israel in Egypt, her experiences in the wilderness and entrance into the promised land, how indeed all these things are types and what blessed lessons are written everywhere for our instruction. The history of the book of Judges finds also a most interesting and important typical application. The book of Joshua typifies the heavenly blessings of the people of God and the heavenly inheritance (corresponding to Ephesians).

The book of Judges unfolds in a typical way the sad story of the decline, apostasy, dissension and corruption of the professing church on earth. The different errors and evils of Christendom may be traced here as well as the different revivals and restorations. The flesh and the world and what allegiance these lead to, slavery and misery with distance from Jehovah, and how the Lord can deliver and bring back His people, are the prominent lessons of this book. Like Joshua and the Pentateuch, Judges is so full and rich in these spiritual types and instructions that they cannot be exhausted. We touch upon these things in the analysis and annotations. May they prove to be helpful hints to a deeper study of this neglected book. And blessed are we if we discover our individual experience, our failures, our need and the faithfulness of our gracious Lord in this book and thus learn more of Him.

The Division of the Book of the Judges

The history of the different declensions in Israel, their oppression by the enemies, and the work wrought by the judges the Lord raised up, begins with chapter 3:5 and is continuously related to the end of chapter 16. The opening chapters of the book are a general introduction, part of which touches upon the contents of the book itself. Chapters 17-21 are an appendix to the main part. The events recorded in these closing chapters must have occurred a little while after the death of Joshua, during the lifetime of Phinehas, the high-priest (20:28). They give a glimpse of the sad internal conditions of the people, how every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Their complete failure towards God and towards themselves as the people of God is clearly seen in these records.

This gives us a threefold division of the book of Judges.

- I. THE INTRODUCTION--ISRAEL'S FAILURES AND THE RESULTS
 1. Israel's Failure in mingling with Canaanites (1:1-36)
 2. The Angel at Bochim and the history of the entire Book (2:1-3:4)
- II. THE DECLENSIONS, PUNISHMENTS AND DELIVERANCES
 1. The Sin of Idolatry and Othniel (3:5-11)
 2. Second Declension: Under Moab--Ehud and Shamgar (3:12-31)
 3. Third Declension: Under Jabin and Deborah and Barak (4:1-5:16)
 4. Fourth Declension: Under Midian and Gideon, Tola and Jair (6:1-10:5)
 5. Fifth Declension: Under the Philistines and Ammon. Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (10:6-12:15)
 6. Sixth Declension: Under the Philistines and Samson (13-16)
- III. THE APPENDIX: ISRAEL'S INTERNAL CORRUPTION
 1. Micah's idolatry and its punishment (17-18)
 2. Israel's moral condition and the War on Benjamin (19-21)

Analysis and Annotations

- I. THE INTRODUCTION: ISRAEL'S FAILURE AND THE RESULTS
 1. Israel's Failure in mingling with the Canaanites

1. The question and the answer (1:1-4)
2. Adoni-Bezek (1:5-7)
3. Jerusalem (1:8)
4. Judah's victory and failure (1:9-20)
5. The children of Benjamin and their failure (1:21)
6. The failures of others (1:22-36)

The book begins with an inquiry of the Lord. This was immediately after the death of Joshua. From chapter 2:7-10 we learn that the people served the Lord during the days of Joshua and the elders who had seen the great works of the Lord and who outlived their leader. Israel looked to the Lord for guidance. They feel their dependence upon Him. How different the history of His people would have been if they had maintained this dependence on the Lord, and acted always in subjection to Him! And the Lord answered the inquiry as He always delights to answer those who put their trust in Him. Judah is to go up to fight against the Canaanite, and the Lord promises victory. The first sign of weakness follows at once. Judah invites Simeon his brother to go with him to fight against the Canaanites, and he promises in return to help Simeon in conquering his lot. It showed that Judah had not full confidence in Jehovah. He put some dependence in his brother, as if he needed his help to gain the promised victory. How often His people have dishonored the Lord by trusting in something besides Himself. Judah going forward by divine command, yet asking the help of Simeon, gained victories, yet he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, for they had chariots of iron (verse 19). What is iron to omnipotence! Had Judah gone forth in utter dependence on Jehovah and in His promise, "I have delivered the land into his hand," the chariots of iron would have not stopped him.

But there were great victories, the blessed assurance that Jehovah is with His people, if they go but forward. Adoni-Bezek is punished in the same manner as he in his wickedness had done to others. Infidels have often found fault with the extermination of the Canaanites. The confession of Adoni-Bezek answers these objections. "As I have done, so God hath requited me." Their punishment was just and well deserved.

The eighth verse is of interest. In Joshua 10:1 Jerusalem is mentioned for the first time in the Bible and that in connection with war. Here the city is smitten by the sword and burned with fire. This has been her history over and over again, and will be again in the future, till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Then there is mentioned once more the most refreshing picture of Caleb, Othniel and Achsah. (See Joshua 15:16-19.) Othniel, which means "lion of God," is the center of it. God delights in whole-heartedness and the victories of His people.

The rest of this first chapter has failure stamped upon it. Benjamin, the warrior tribe permitted the Jebusites to dwell with them and did not drive them out. There is not even a reported attempt. The command of the Lord was wholly ignored by them. They were in the worst condition (chapters 20-21). Manasseh failed. Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer. Zebulun, Asher and Naphtali all failed to dislodge the enemies God had commanded them to destroy entirely. And Dan instead of conquering was conquered. The Amorites forced them into the hill country. Unbelief, lack of confidence in Jehovah, was the cause of it all. These

enemies here are typical of the flesh and the fleshly lusts in the believer. And these lusts, the carnal nature, must be put and kept in the place of death. We are enabled to do this by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is given to us of God. If we walk not in the Spirit, that is, in faith, we shall be overcome by these things; instead of conquering we will be conquered. The old nature not triumphed over will bring us into bondage as it is with so many of God's children.

2. The Angel at Bochim and the History of the Entire Book

CHAPTERS 2:1-3:4

1. The angel at Bochim (2:1-5)
2. Israel's obedience remembered (2:6-10)
3. Israel's strange gods (2:11-15)
4. Israel's history under the judges outlined (2:16-18)
5. The nations left to prove Israel (2:19-3:4)

The opening event of this chapter is significant. The Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. This Angel is Jehovah Himself. His own words reveal this fact. In Joshua's time after the land had been possessed the Angel of the Lord, Jehovah in visible form, was with them and as leader of the Lord's host led them on in the conquest (Joshua 5:13-15). Israel had left Gilgal, the place where the reproach had been rolled away, the place of the "sharp knives," typical of self-judgment. It was for Israel the place of strength and power for victory, as it gave the flesh nothing to glory in. They had left Gilgal. How often we, who are crucified with Christ, leave our Gilgal and instead of glorying in the Lord and having no confidence in the flesh, we too act in self-confidence. The place to which the Angel went was "Bochim." It means "weepers." It was the best place for Israel to be after all their failures to do what the Lord had commanded them. It is the place today for us in the midst of the worldliness in which so many of the Lord's people have drifted, as well as the divisions which exist among those, who are members of the one body, and other evils besides. But Bochim, the place for weeping, must be the place of self-judgment and confession. It was not so for Israel. They wept when the plain words of Jehovah told them their disobedience and when they heard what should follow. "I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." But we do not read anything of a true repentance and return unto Jehovah.

From chapter 2:6-3:4 we have the history of the whole period of Judges outlined. There is first mention made of their obedience and service, how they began in the Spirit. The second generation, as it is always the case, leads to failure. For the first time we read the words which, as already stated, appear in six other places in this book. "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." They forsook Him, the loving, gracious Jehovah, whose kindness and tender mercies are so fully revealed in their past history and instead of serving such a God, they served Baal and Ashtaroth. Connected with this Canaanite "religion" were the vilest immoralities by which they were dragged down to the level of these doomed nations. All moral corruption, social and political confusion is the result of turning away from God. Romans 1:19-32 reveals the awful steps down. Christendom in apostasy, turning away from God and from the light, leads to moral corruption as well. Turning away from the truth means being turned

into fables.

The Lord then acted in behalf of His backslidden people and raised up judges (verses 16-18). The result was recovery, and once more the people under these revivals rejoiced in victory over their enemies and the promised covenant blessings. Self-judgment, which is true repentance, had to precede each revival. They cried unto the Lord; they sought His face, and then deliverance came. Even so it is in the individual experience of the children of God.

Yet in spite of these revivals in Israel the tendency is downward. "When the judge died they returned and corrupted themselves beyond their fathers ... they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way." So it has been in the professing Church. Revivals have come and gone, but it has not remedied the wayward conditions, and the departure from God and His Word becomes more and more pronounced till the final great apostasy is reached. The only complete deliverance can be the coming of the Lord which we do not find fully revealed in the types of the book of Judges.

II. THE DECLENSIONS, PUNISHMENTS AND DELIVERANCES

1. The Sin of Idolatry and Othniel

CHAPTER 3:5-11

1. The first declension (3:5-7)
2. Sold to the king of Mesopotamia (3:8)
3. The deliverance through Othniel (3:9-11)

The first declension, bondage and deliverance is briefly related. We see how Israel went from bad to worse. First, the wicked nations they were to exterminate dwelt amongst them. Then the children of Israel established some relationship with them and dwelt amongst these nations. First, the children of Israel permitted them to exist in their midst; then the doomed nations gained the power over Israel and the people of God became dependent on them. The third step down is intermarriage. They did exactly what Jehovah had forbidden (Deut. 7:2). Then they began to serve their idol-gods. It began by "forgetting the LORD." The application to the individual believer and to the professing church can easily be made. If He is forgotten, who has redeemed us and made us His own, an alliance with the world is soon formed and rapid decline follows. The same story is written in the message to Ephesus, which stands prophetically for the Apostolic age. "I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4). Leaving the first love means to have no longer the Lord Jesus Christ as the all-absorbing object before the heart. Thus the decline began in the Church, and it always begins in this way in the individual believer.

Chushan-Rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, becomes their lord and they served him eight years. This king is the first punitive instrument in Jehovah's hands. His name very significantly reveals the very condition into which Israel had plunged. Chushan-Rishathaim means "the blackness of double wickedness." They had become doubly wicked, leaving Jehovah and serving strange gods.

When they cried unto the Lord out of the depths of their misery and sin, casting themselves once more upon Jehovah and turning their backs upon

the strange gods, the Lord answered and sent a saviour who saved them. (The authorized version has "deliverer." The correct translation is "saviour.") It is the same Othniel of whom we read in chapter 1:13 and Joshua 15:17. Othniel means "lion of God," and as he was of Judah, he is the type of Him, who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Upon him rested the Spirit of the Lord. The king of Mesopotamia was given into his hands, and a rest of fifty years followed for Israel. Thus we too must return to the Lord and expect our deliverance from Him. What grace towards His people is manifested in this first deliverance!

2. Second Declension Under Moab--Ehud and Shamgar

CHAPTER 3:12-31

1. The second declension: serving Eglon, king of Moab (3:12-14)
2. Ehud raised up (3:15)
3. Eglon, king of Moab, slain by Ehud (3:16-25)
4. The deliverance by Shamgar (3:31)

When they continued to do evil Jehovah used Eglon, king of Moab to punish their disobedience and evil-doings. With him there is Ammon and Amalek, a trinity of evil. The city of Palms is Jericho (Deut. 34:3) a type of the world, as we saw from Joshua. Moab pictures typically an outward, empty, Christian profession. Amalek is the type of the lusts of the flesh which flourish with those, who have the form of godliness but deny the power thereof. How many today have become captives of Moab! The greater part of Protestantism, with a name to live, yet dead, is in that deplorable condition.

They served Eglon eighteen years. For the second time they cried unto the Lord and again He answered graciously by raising up Ehud, the son of Gera, the left-handed Benjamite. The story of the deliverance wrought by him is interesting. Without repeating the history of the chapter we give briefly its typical meaning. Ehud's father was Gera, which means "meditation." This is needed first of all to get deliverance from a mere profession or world prosperity with its attending evils to bring the soul to a blessed realization of its possessions and blessings in Christ. Ehud means "I will give praise." Here is the deliverance for God's people out of a dead formalism. Meditation on the Word leads to a believing possession of the realities of redemption in our Lord Jesus Christ. This is followed by praise, the confession of His Name. Then Moab's bondage is ended.

Ehud was left-handed, showing the weakness of the instrument. The two-edged dagger is the type of the Word of God, while the hand which grasps it illustrates how faith is to use the sword of the Spirit. Then Ehud, the Son of Gera, the left-handed, thrust the two-edged dagger into the fat belly of Eglon. Fat is the emblem of prosperity, the prosperity of the world by which so many of God's people become captivated. The sword of the Spirit must be plunged into that which is of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

"Face to face in this solemn place, in solemn silence and alone they stand; the fat, prosperous world; and poor, left-handed faith. The scene is quickly over. Into the very belly of Eglon sinks the sharp sword of Ehud; the very belly, the center of all that is of the world and not of the Father; of 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life';

that which flesh serves (Phil. 3) and which is never satisfied, is pierced through and through. With what result? Its true nature is fully exposed. Let us not be so falsely delicate as not to profit by this strong-worded truth. The prosperity of the world, fat and flourishing as it appears externally, is seen under the stroke of God's word--in the light of Jesus, whom it crucified, being the Son of the living God--as nothing but 'dirt.' Yea, so says another Benjamite, who well knew how to wield that sword: 'I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in Him.' How much does this leave of fat Eglon alive?" (F.C. Jennings, Notes on judges.)

Then the trumpet of victory was blown. Even so is our faith the victory which overcometh the world.

Shamgar's work seems to have been closely connected with that of Ehud. He smote the Philistines with an ox-goad. The ox-goad is like the sword, an emblem of the Word of God. Then the land had rest for eighty years.

3. Third Declension: Under Jabin, Deborah, and Barak

CHAPTER 4

1. Sold into the hand of Jabin (4:1-2)
2. The cry of the children of Israel (4:3)
3. Deborah and Barak (4:4-11)
4. The conflict and Jael's deed (4:12-24)

Ehud the mighty instrument of Jehovah had died, and again the children of Israel lapsed into evil. Then the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, King of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor. His captain was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. A powerful oppressor he was, for this King had nine hundred chariots of iron and oppressed Israel twenty years. About one hundred and thirty years before Joshua had overcome Jabin, King of Hazor. "He took Hazor and smote the King thereof with the sword, for Hazor before him was the head of all these kingdoms." All were slain and Hazor was burnt with fire. And now the Lord sold them into his hand. This Jabin is a successor of the one whom Joshua had killed. Hazor had been built again out of its ruins. We see, so to speak, a resurrection of an old enemy. It is significant too that this declension and captivity under Jabin is the third one. As mentioned in annotations on Genesis the number three stands everywhere in the Word for revival and resurrection. The former enemy enslaves Israel once more. How often has this been the case in the history of the church, and how true it is today. Satan knows how to revive old errors and evils and use them to bring God's people into captivity. And is it not so in our individual experience? Some sin which overpowered us was through the grace and strength of Christ and of His Spirit mastered, and its power broken. But can that same sin not be revived? Is it forever gone? If there is neglect of prayer, no childlike dependence in true humility, no watchfulness, it will, like Jabin, return and domineer over us in even greater power than before. Jabin means "discerning"--"understanding." This city Hazor, where he dwelt, means "enclosure." This Jabin represents human intellect, the understanding of the natural man, which is corrupt and opposed to God and to His revelation. It is the wisdom of the world. Jabin is in his own "enclosure," which rejects and excludes what God has given. The Christian believer is called

upon to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. "Casting down imaginations (reasonings), and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Man's own thoughts, his natural understanding, must be completely subjected to God's Word. How much of this spirit of exaltation against the knowledge of God is about us and in the professing church! Higher criticism belongs here. All the errors in doctrine, affecting always the Person of our Lord, are the results of putting the thoughts of man above the Word of God. Then in connection with this we must think of the sects and parties, the works of the flesh, that is the natural man and his reasonings, which have divided the body of Christ. These divisions are "the enclosures" of Jabin.

"As the enemy of the people of God, it is the wisdom of the world with which we have here to do--a wisdom which reigns in its own 'enclosure,' shut up, as is the constant fashion, in cliques and parties and philosophies, by which it elevates itself over what is outside its boundary. The spirit of it is easily manifest as that of self: self-interest, self-assertion, self-satisfaction, the true 'trader' or Canaanite spirit, that of gain. The inroad of this into the Church was early indeed. 'All seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ,' was said, in the apostle's days, of those at Rome (Phil. 2:21). Of the Ephesian elders it was prophesied, 'Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them' (Acts 20:30). But already at Corinth the sects and parties produced by such attempts were being formed, as we know, and the true people of God were becoming subject to Jabin's rule; and this has developed much more widely since, even until the Church of God has been broken up into various denominations, to the dishonor of the One Name which is upon us all" (F.W. Grant).

Then once more the children of Israel cried unto the Lord. Jabin's mighty oppression and the humiliation connected with it had become so great that they turned to the Lord. How beautiful it is to see throughout these declensions, that the Lord seemed just to wait for this one thing, His people to cry to Him. As soon as they cried He answered. He is the same today. How willing and ready He is to break all the chains of His people and save them from the hands of all their enemies! True revivals always started in deep humiliation, in self-judgment, in prayer. But alas! the state of such, who have departed from the faith, who are the willing captives of Satan, who love this present evil age and who do not cry to the Lord! The Lord brought deliverance through a woman, Deborah, the prophetess. The weaker vessel is now summoned to judge. The name Deborah means "the Word." It is the Word and the Word of God alone which can deliver from the wisdom of this world and from error and sin. But Deborah is married. She is the wife of Lapidoth. Lapidoth means "firebrands." He is typical of the Holy Spirit. The Word, and the Spirit in the Word give the victory and deliver. And Deborah did not dwell in an "enclosure." She dwelt under the palm tree between Ramah and Bethel. The palm tree typifies the spiritual prosperity of the believer. This we enjoy if we let the Word in the power of the Spirit judge us. Then we have our Ramah (heights) the blessed knowledge of our standing in Christ and Bethel (House of God) our fellowship with Him. That is where our palm tree, our spiritual blessing lies.

Deborah sent for Barak. Barak means "lightning." Here we have judgment indicated. The Word calls for judgment and judgment will surely come, as it was executed through Barak upon Jabin and his host.

And so this age ends with the lightning flash of judgment, when the bundled up tares will be burned with fire. All the wisdom of this world, higher criticism, Christian Science, falsely so-called, and every other form of evil will then pass away. All error will end forever with the coming of our Lord. But there is a second woman mentioned in this chapter, Jael the wife of Heber. She slew Sisera, the wicked captain of Jabin, with the tent pin. Her deed is specially celebrated in song.

CHAPTER 5

The Song of Deborah and Barak

1. The praise of Jehovah (5:1-5)
2. The condition of the people and their deliverance (5:6-11)
3. The celebration of the victory and the victors (5:12-22)
4. The fate of the enemy (5:23-31)

This is one of the prophetic songs of the Bible. It is full of the fire of passion and enthusiasm, reflecting the character of the woman through whom the deliverance had been wrought. It has been classed with the barbaric outbursts of the battle-hymns and odes of triumph of heathen nations, likened to some wild chant of a victor, whose blood-thirst has been quenched in the cruel overthrow of his enemies. Such estimates of this song, so often made by the critics of the Bible, are incorrect. Deborah speaks as a prophetess. She begins with ascribing praise to Jehovah; she ends with Jehovah. This prophetic outburst is marked by limitations. She has no glimpse of the final victory which is mentioned in other songs of triumph, and especially in the Psalms. There are phrases which the Holy Spirit utters through Deborah, which He used in other prophetic songs. The following passages of Scripture may be compared with Deborah's words and will be helpful in the closer study of this chapter. Exodus 15:1-9; Deut. 32:1-3, 16-17; Psalm 67:1-4, 8, 11, 34-35; Psalm 83:9-10; Hab. 3:1-4; Psalm 18:7; Psalm 77:11-12; Luke 1:28, 71-74.

While all this is true and we do not forget that Deborah was the chosen instrument, raised up to effect the great deliverance, we also must recognize the strong human element which is so prominent. One must beware of giving to the deeds done, especially to the deed of Jael in its detail, divine sanction and endorsement. It was an act of courage and of faith; she was moved by faith and that faith led her to kill Sisera, the enemy of Israel.

"The act of Jael, who smote a nail into the temples of the sleeping Sisera, does not claim our approbation; still, when we estimate the character of the act, the extenuating circumstances are entitled to attention--the times in which she lived, her ardent and enthusiastic devotion to the cause of Israel, the general and glowing hatred of the tyrannical oppressor of the people, etc. If such considerations are allowed to plead in favor of a Charlotte Corday, much more appropriately do they vindicate the act of a Jael. The same remark applies to the act of Ehud, which, according to our moral principles, was an assassination worthy of reprobation alone." (J.H. Kurtz, Sacred History)

Meroz is especially mentioned (verse 23). Deborah speaks with authority then, and has her message from the Angel of the Lord. He said: "Curse ye, Meroz, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they

came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty." Meroz might have helped, but they lived there in luxuries. Meroz means "built of cedars"; they dwelt in palaces of cedars and lived in ease, unconcerned about the condition of their brethren. And the angel of the Lord said that they did not call up to the help of the Lord. The indifference they manifested in not helping their brethren is thus charged as not helping the Lord against the mighty. As in the New Testament so here the Lord identifies Himself with His suffering people. God deliver His people today from the indifference of Meroz, which is high treason against the Lord and His cause!

Verses 24-31 are a vivid description of what took place. The mother of Sisera is seen awaiting the return of her victorious son. She expects nothing but good and her wise ladies are with her. It is a remarkable irony. Thus all the enemies of Jehovah will perish, while for those who love Him there is glory and rest in store. Deborah could only express a longing that the enemies might perish, and those that love Him be as the sun in might and splendour. It was her prayer. We know more through the full light of prophecy how the enemies of God will perish and the glory shall be for those who love Him.

4. Fourth Declension: Under Midian and Gideon, Tola and Jair

CHAPTER 6

1. Israel's suffering from Midian (6:1-6)
2. Their repentance and the divine answer (6:7-10)
3. Gideon, the deliverer, chosen (6:11-24)
4. The restored worship (6:25-32)
5. The gathering for the conflict (6:33-35)
6. The sign of the fleece (6:36-40)

After Deborah and Barak the land had fifty years' rest, and when again they did evil they were delivered into the hand of Midian for seven years. It was a most cruel oppression which they suffered and on account of their repeated unfaithfulness. They sank now lower than during the previous declensions and captivities. They were stripped of everything and greatly impoverished. The Amalekites came also and made common cause with Midian against Israel.

The word Midian means "strife." Midian is typical of the world in its opposition to and separation from God. Midian and Moab are often seen together. Both typify the world as the enemy of God. The Midianites with Moab tried to get Balaam to curse Israel (Num. 22:6). Moab and Midian were the means of bringing God's judgment upon Israel through the woman Balaam brought into the midst of God's people. Then Israel was joined to Baal-Peor, and the Lord told Moses: "Vex the Midianites and smite them" (Num. 25:17). Amalek represents the flesh with its lusts. The world and the flesh ever combine to enslave God's people and rob them of their blessings; "greatly impoverish them" as Midian did to Israel. How the Church has been spoiled by Midian and is today in the sad condition typified by Midian's power over Israel, we cannot follow at great length. The world is in the Church--separation is given up and the methods of the world have become the methods of the Church. In the Church message to Pergamos, Balaam and the stumbling-block he cast before the children of Israel, are mentioned. It represents that period of the Church when the Church gave up her separation

and settled down in the world. (The seven Church messages in Rev. 2 and 3 are prophetic of the history of the Church on earth. Pergamos is that period which began with Constantine.)

And the same application of Midian must be made of the individual believer. How God's Word warns against the world and the corruption which is through lust. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

When they cried to the Lord a prophet was sent to them. The deliverer they looked for is withheld for a time to deepen their need and burden their souls with a greater sense of the evil they had done. The unnamed prophet brings therefore a twofold message: The message of God's faithfulness and the message of their disobedience.

Next we see an angel of the Lord under an oak in Ophrah. Gideon, the son of Joash, threshed wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. The angel greeted him. "The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." And Gideon addressed him telling out the burden of his soul. If the LORD be with us why then is all this befallen us? ... But now the LORD hath forsaken us." It was the language of despair "Then the LORD looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the land of the Midianites; have not I sent thee?" And still Gideon is reluctant to believe the message and the Lord tells him "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." The Lord had called him, and when He calls He also fits for the service and is with the servant. Oh! the blessed word "I will be with thee." And the One who spoke to Gideon is the same, who has left to us the precious word, "Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the world." Then Gideon brought his offering upon the rock, and the Angel of the Lord with his staff brought the fire which consumed it all, while He departed from Gideon's sight. Then it dawned upon Gideon that he had been face to face with Jehovah, and he feared death. A blessed message came to him then. "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die."

Then he built an altar and called it "Jehovah-shalom"--the LORD is peace. All is full of meaning. The offering he brought typifies Christ; so does the rock upon which it was brought. The fire consumed it all, carried it upward to God. And upon that the assurance of peace is given. Even so He is our peace. Blessed be God for such a precious, beautiful name--"Jehovah-shalom"--the Lord is peace. So we need not to fear, for He has made peace through the blood of His cross, and He is our peace. And therefore like Gideon we need an altar to worship. True peace with God, and the enjoyment of Himself as our peace, leads to worship, yea, it demands worship. Such the Father seeketh. As holy priests we come, made nigh by His precious blood, and bring our spiritual sacrifices. If Christ were constantly enjoyed, the facts of our redemption of blood never forgotten, Midian, this poor world, could never impoverish us. And deliverance out of worldliness and a new separation unto Him must needs have for its starting point a heart-return to Himself, who is our peace.

Then Gideon does what his name (cutter down) means. Baal's altar must fall down. He began his great work at home. It was a bold deed by which he put himself completely on the Lord's side and stirred up the wrath of the

enemy. And then the enemies gather for the battle. The Spirit of the Lord then came upon Gideon. He was endued with the Spirit for the approaching deliverance. The enemies were coming in like a flood, but the Spirit of God lifted up a standard against them.

Finally Gideon asked his signs. He still hesitated. And the wonderful patience and condescension of Jehovah in meeting poor, wavering Gideon! The fleece in the midst of the ground is the type of Israel in the midst of the nations. The dew is the symbol of divine grace and mercy. It is the Lord who forsakes and who refreshes Israel. Israel today is like the fleece without the dew, while the ground, the Gentiles, possess of the grace of God. But ere long the dew will fall upon Israel again and the time of their blessing and fulness will come.

CHAPTER 7

The Victory of Gideon

1. The sifting of Gideon's army (7:1-8)
2. The dream of the Midianite (7:9-15)
3. Victory through weakness (7:16-25)

Gideon "the cutter down," now also called Jerubbaal "the contender with Baal," after his faith had been strengthened, pitched his camp at the well of Harod (trembling). The Lord did not need the large army he had gathered, lest Israel would say: "Mine own hand hath saved me." First 22,000 were let go. They were afraid. What an evidence of the sad conditions among the people. Jehovah had commanded through Moses this test. "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and faint hearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart" (Deut. 20:8). Faint heartedness and fear are but unbelief. Faith is courage and does not reckon with iron-chariots, with the powers of Midian, but with an omnipotent Lord. After the 22,000 had left, 10,000 remained and the Lord said again, "The people are too many." Only 300 were selected who took up water out of the brook in their hands as they drank. Kneeling down, drinking in leisure, is the natural way for man to do. They showed thereby that they were inclined to take matters easy and to satisfy their need to the full. Taking the water into the hand and lapping it like a dog is not the natural way for man to drink. They were less absorbed with satisfying their natural wants. They showed thereby their eagerness to press on. Thus the army was narrowed down to the 300 whom the Lord would use in His service. How many of the Lord's people today like Gideon's army are unfit for service? Unbelief and too much occupation with earthly things, the creature wants, stand in the way.

To encourage Gideon still more the Lord permitted him to overhear how a soldier related his dream. That dream was like Nebuchadnezzar's great dream given by the Lord. The loaf of barley bread which smote the tent is another figure of the Word of God. Midian and Amalek, the world and the lusts of the flesh, can only be dealt with and overthrown by the Bread of Life, the living and abiding Word of God.

Read in connection with Gideon's victory 2 Cor. 4:4-12. Here we find a blessed application. The light hath shined into our hearts, so that it might shine out. The pitchers, the earthen vessels, represent our old self. If the light is to shine out, the victory to be won, the old self must be

broken to pieces.

CHAPTER 8

Internal Strife, Gideon's Failure and End

1. The strife (8:1-9)
2. The complete deliverance (8:10-21)
3. Gideon's failure and end (8:22-32)
4. Israel's failure after Gideon (8:33-35)

Internal strife follows. The two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, were slain (7:25). Oreb means "raven" and Zeeb means "wolf." Oreb, the raven, is slain on the rock and Zeeb, the wolf, at the winepress. The raven, the bird which represents darkness and evil, is the type of corruption; the wolf is the destroyer of the sheep. The rock and the winepress typify the Lord Jesus Christ and His Cross. There the victory over both was won.

The internal strife was born in selfishness. Ephraim chided him sharply, because he had not called them to the fight. Gideon's wise and gracious answer averted the threatening dissension. How beautifully it illustrates Phil. 2:1-5. All church strifes begin with self-seeking vain-glory. The remedy is "in lowliness of mind let each esteem the other better than themselves."

A greater victory follows after the internal strife had been overcome. The men of Succoth and of Peniel, Israelites, mocked Gideon and refused him help. They were really secret allies of Midian. After the victory these mocking, half-hearted Israelites were whipped by Gideon with the briers and thorns of the wilderness to teach them the needed lesson. How often we also in half-heartedness, world-bordering and being occupied too much with earthly things, need the thorns and briers, anxieties, disappointments and sufferings to bring us into line.

When they wanted to make Gideon king he refused. But while he refused that honor he tries to grasp another, the priesthood. He gathers the gold to make a priestly ephod and put it in Ophrah. It became a snare for all Israel as well as for Gideon, for they went "a whoring after it." The gold was taken from the enemy. It was a self-glorification of the victor Gideon. He and all Israel forgot that the glory belonged to Jehovah. Gideon claimed an honor which did not belong to him. Even so it has been done on Christian ground. A false priesthood with man in place of the Lord and His work, the instruments used in the power of the Spirit of God exalted instead of Him who furnished the instrument, these are the lessons which may be traced here in Gideon's sad failure. How many a servant of Christ, forgetting 1 Cor. 4:7: "And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" has fallen into the same snare, and as a result lost his power and blessing! The many wives of Gideon and the concubine of Shechem tell the other side. Amalek (the flesh) spoiled him. Like priest, like people. Israel went whoring after Baal and forgot once more Jehovah.

CHAPTER 9

Abimelech the King and His Wickedness

1. The murder of Gideon's sons (9:1-6)
2. Jotham's parable (9:7-21)
3. Scenes of strife and destruction of Shechem (9:22-49)
4. Abimelech's end (9:50-57)

The story of Abimelech is intensely interesting in its typical meaning. Abimelech was the offspring of an unlawful union: the son of Gideon and the concubine in Shechem. He was half Israelite and half Canaanite. Abimelech means "my father was king"; he claims therefore supremacy, lordship over the people Israel on the basis of succession. His father had refused that honor; the bastard offspring claims it. He gains his object by a conspiracy and by murdering the sons of his father, with the exception of Jotham, who hid himself. And this domineerer over the people bears the name of the Philistine kings.

This illustrates perfectly that corrupt system of Christendom which is half Christian and half heathenish--Rome. It is like Abimelech--a bastard system. She is called in Revelation "Jezebel," the heathen woman who was married to an Israelitish king. Rome claims apostolic succession through Peter, who disclaimed any preeminence, but rather warned against "lording over God's heritage." Ecclesiastical assumption to control and govern the people of God, so prominent in corrupt Christendom, is dearly indicated in Abimelech's act of putting himself forward as king. And the murderous spirit of Abimelech is there likewise.

Jotham (Jehovah is perfect), the youngest son of Gideon, is the witness against it. He uttered a parable from Gerizim. The olive, the fig-tree and the vine refused to reign over the trees. The bramble becomes king to devour with fire the cedars of Lebanon. He applied the parable to Abimelech, who had been made king.

"The tendency of man's heart is to make another king than God, to put leaders in His place, and thus to destroy the use and blessing for which the olive, the fig, the vine, the various gifts of God, are given. But just those who are really worthiest will most surely refuse to leave their spheres of happy service, their sweetness, and their fruit, to go to 'wave over,'--flutter idly in the wind over the trees. Thus royalty comes naturally to the thorn-bush, which need give up nothing, but which has thus nothing in its gift but thorns,--such as, indeed, the men of Succoth (chapter 8:16) were taught with. But worse would come than this--the fire of God's wrath, which, from this side and from that, would destroy both king and people" (Numerical Bible).

Three years later the prediction in Jotham's parable comes true; fire came out from Abimelech and devoured the men of Shechem; and fire came out from Shechem and devoured Abimelech. It was God who sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. Then there is the revolt of Gaal, (loathing), the son of Ebed (servitude), and he opposed Abimelech. Something similar came to pass in Christendom. On account of the domineering rule of Rome there was the revolt against her. The overthrow of the ecclesiastical oppressor was attempted. But Gaal's attempt fails. He is overcome. Abimelech and his officer Zebul are victorious. The revolt has failed. Even so today Rome is gaining, and those who "protested" once against her wickedness, now are following her pernicious ways once more. Abimelech's end was brought about by a piece of a millstone which a woman cast on him, and a young man thrust him through with a sword and he died. It was a fearful end in judgment. Even so it is written of Babylon, the

mother of harlots, Rome. "And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more." ... "And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth" (Rev. 18:21, 24).

CHAPTER 10:1-5

Tola and Jair

1. Tola judging twenty-three years (10:1-2)
2. Jair judging twenty-two years (10:3-5)

These are but brief records but not without meaning. Tola means, translated, "a worm." What a contrast with the proud, wicked, domineering Abimelech! Here is one, who takes the place in self-abasement. It reminds us of Him, whose voice we hear in the great Atonement Psalm "I am a worm and no man." Tola, no doubt, typifies our Lord in His humiliation. When Abimelech's awful rule is ended, He who was obedient unto death, the death of the cross, will come to reign in righteousness.

And this seems to be more fully brought to our attention in Jair, the judge, who followed Tola. His name means, "enlightener." He is a type of our Lord in His coming as "the Sun of Righteousness." The thirty sons, who rode on thirty ass-colts and had thirty cities, must mean the rule of that kingdom to come in which His sons, His co-heirs, will have a part, as Jair's sons had authority over these cities.

5. Fifth Declension:

Under the Philistines and Ammon. Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon

CHAPTER 10:6-18

1. The great declension (10:6-9)
2. Their cry and the Lord's answer (10:10-14)
3. Confession and self-judgment (10:15-18)

This is the greatest declension yet. They did evil again, served Baalim, Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, Zidon, Moab, Ammon and the Philistines. They were then sold by the Lord into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the children of Ammon. Ammon has rightly been taken to typify rationalism in every form and the wicked doctrines, the denials of the faith, which follow in its train. Christian Science, Russellism, higher criticism, Seventh Day Adventism, Unitarianism and a host of other "isms" are of the Ammonite tribe. The Philistines typify ritualism. Like Ammon and the Philistines, these two enemies distress sorely the people of God from all sides. Then they cried unto Him and confessed their sins, and Jehovah reminded them of all His goodness in past deliverances and threatened them that He would not deliver them. "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." But when they continued to plead and to confess, when they put away the strange gods, when they began to serve Him again, though He had denied their first cry--His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel. What a compassionate Lord He is! Then they gathered together and encamped at Mizpah--the watchtower.

CHAPTER 11

Jephthah and the Ammonites

1. Jephthah's covenant (11:1-11)
2. The messages to Ammon (11:12-28)
3. Jephthah's vow and victory (11:29-33)
4. Jephthah keeps his vow (11:34-40)

Jephthah the judge who delivered Israel from the servitude of Ammon was the offspring of an unholy union "the son of an harlot." Then he became an outcast and had to flee from his brethren. He dwelt in the land of Tob (goodness) and vain, or worthless, men gathered unto him. Yet he was a mighty man of valor. He was therefore an humble instrument, despised and rejected by his own. But finally those who rejected him had to send for Jephthah to be their saviour from the hands of the children of Ammon. They had to own him as their leader, whom they had hated and cast out on account of his lowly birth. He reminds us of our Lord, who was hated by His own and who is yet to be their deliverer.

Jephthah means "he opens." Gilead, to which he belonged, means "witness." The enemy, Ammon, as we stated in the annotations of the previous chapter, typifies for us rationalism and the wicked errors connected with it, which distress the people of God. Here then we have in a simple yet blessed way the deliverance from those evils indicated. It needs "a true witness," one who "opens." The witness of an opened Word, the testimony of the Word of God and with it the Spirit of God, will make an end of error. It is the only true way to combat the wicked departures from the faith so prominent in the last days. How God in this book bears witness in types to the one remedy for all the declensions and backslidings of His people! Othniel has Debir "the Word"; Ehud with his sword, the sword of the Spirit; Shamgar and his oxgoad; Deborah and Lapidoth, the Word and the Spirit; the barley loaf which smote down Midian's tent and Jephthah, the one who opens, the true witness.

Jephthah made a hasty vow. It was bargaining with Jehovah, as Jacob did. And when his daughter met him first the awful vow was carried out. In reading the story one can hardly escape the literal offering up of the child.

"it is true that a mode of interpreting this vow and its fulfilment has been proposed, according to which Jephthah's daughter was not offered as a sacrifice, but devoted to a life of celibacy, and consecrated to the service of the tabernacle; and the confirmation of this view has been sought in the institution of an order of females who served before the tabernacle (Exod. 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22; Luke 2:37). Luther already remarked: 'Some maintain that she was not sacrificed, but the text is too clear to admit of this interpretation.' But stronger evidence of her sacrifice than even the unambiguous words of the vow afford, is found in the distress of the father, in the magnanimous resignation of the daughter, in the annual commemoration and lamentation of the daughters of Israel, and, particularly, in the narrative of the historian himself, who is not able to describe clearly and distinctly the terrible scene on which he gazes both with admiration and with abhorrence. The Law undoubtedly prohibited human sacrifices as the extreme of all heathen abominations (Lev. 18:21; Deut. 12:31, etc.). But the age of the judges had descended to a point far below the lofty position occupied by the Law." (J.H. Kurtz, Sacred History.)

And yet there are difficulties in connection with literal interpretation. The word burnt-offering is in the Hebrew "an offering that ascends."

"The great Jewish commentators of the Middle Ages have, in opposition to the Talmud, pointed out that these two last clauses ('shall surely be the Lord's and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering') are not identical. It is never said of an animal burnt offering that it 'should be to Jehovah,' for the simple reason that as a burnt offering it is such. But where human beings are offered to Jehovah, there the expression is used, as in the case of the firstborn among Israel and of Levi (Num. 3:12, 13). But in these cases it has never been suggested that there was actual human sacrifice. If the loving daughter had devoted herself to death, it is next to incredible that she should have wished to have spent the two months of her life conceded to her, not with her broken-hearted father, but in the mountains with her companions" (A. Edersheim).

Whatever it was, one thing stands out very prominently, the loyalty of Jephthah to Jehovah and the obedience and surrender of the daughter.

CHAPTER 12

The strife--Jephthah's Death--The Other Judges

1. The strife and the slaying of the Ephraimites (12:1-6)
2. Jephthah's death (12:7)
3. Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (12:8-15)

The strife of Ephraim and their question reminds us of what happens under the judgeship of Gideon. There the soft answer turned away wrath. How different it is here. Jephthah in self exaltation shows a far different spirit. Notice the "I" in his answer. "I was at great strife"--"I and my people"--"I called you"--"I saw"--"I put my life in my hand." A great strife follows. The Gileadites take the fords of Jordan and those who said "Sibboleth" were slain. Horrible record! Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were murdered. And this sad extermination of brethren has its sequel in Christendom. Shibboleth means "flood," that which divides. Sectarianism is undoubtedly in view here. How God's people have suffered under it and still suffer! It is true "every test that divides the people of God from one another, and not from their enemies, is another false 'shibboleth.'" May God graciously deliver His people from all sectarian strife, which is but the work and the fruit of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).

Three judges follow after Jephthah's death. These correspond to their typical meaning to Tola and Jair after Abimelech's lordship had been broken. Ibzan of Bethlehem. Ibzan means "shining"--"splendour." Then there is Elon, which means "strength"; and Abdon, the meaning of which is "service," the son of Hillel, "praising." These three give us a little glimpse of "Him who will come in splendor and in strength"--that is "in power and great glory," to set things right. Then all strife and disorder will end and happy service and praise will follow.

6. Sixth Declension: Under the Philistines and Samson

CHAPTER 13

1. Israel delivered to the Philistines (13:1)
2. Manoah and his wife (13:2-23)
3. Samson born (13:24-25)

The sixth and last declension of Israel in this book is now before us. This section has deep and interesting lessons. The darkest period is reached. The Philistines lorded over Israel. We miss in connection with this declension the statement which occurs in every preceding departure from Jehovah: "And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD." Here is no cry recorded nor a return unto the Lord. It seems the greatest indifference controlled the people so that there was no desire to cry to the Lord. And when we come to the deliverance we find that it was an imperfect one. "He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (verse 5), is the divine announcement of Samson's work. And how did he end? He died as a captive of the Philistines. But what does the Philistine typify? He represents the religious man, one who has the form of godliness but knows not the power, the ritualistic Pharisee. We quote from Notes on Judges by F.C. Jennings:

Turning to the tenth chapter of Genesis, we find the genealogy of the Philistines. They are the children of Ham, and Ham is, as his name denotes, the "black one" or sunburnt. Dark indeed, but darkened by the sun. God wanted a man who should show us, as in a figure, or picture, what He sees man who is turned away from Himself (light), so He brings on to the stage of this world a "black man," a man made black by the sun, and crystalizes the sorrowful truth in his name, Ham. A very clear picture of the "old man." The sun has shone upon him indeed, but he has not received the light. He has rejected the light--has not come to the light, has hated the light, and, of course, it has not enlightened him; but it must have had some effect. What is it? It has been only to darken him. We may truthfully say that if he had never had light he would not have been dark as he is, and the brighter the light, the darker he has become. Now this is surely the picture of the Pharisee rather than the Publican. It was the Pharisee, the religious man, who was warned "if the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." It was the Pharisee, the religious man, not the Publican, of whom the Lord testified that his deeds were evil. It was the Pharisee, the religious man of that day, who with the very Light of the World--the true, bright light shining clearly right before his eyes--asked for a sign! As if one should ask for a light at noonday--what would it prove but his blindness? Oh, blind Pharisee, oh, dark Pharisee, oh, thou child of Ham, thou unregenerate religionist, thou unconverted church-member, how great was, and is even up to this day, thy darkness--a "black man" indeed!

The marks of the Philistine are given as follows:

First. Wherever there is an introduction of carnal principles--that is, principles that the flesh can understand and approve--into the things of God, there is the Philistine.

Second. Wherever there is the teaching of some other way into the land of blessing than by the Red Sea and Jordan (the Cross of Christ) there is the Philistine.

Third. Wherever there are claims to sole authority over the refreshing fountain of God's Word, which is then tightly shut up, there is the

Philistine, for that is how his ancestors treated Abraham's wells.

Fourth. Wherever you get uncertainty as to sins forgiven--a dread, cold fear that all is not well, for there is no knowledge of a sacrifice that takes away sin--there is the work of the Philistine.

Fifth. Wherever you get principles that would bind the energy of faith, there is the Philistine. And one may still further question whether there are not other phases of Philistinism, far more subtle and dangerous in these last days, than these open expressions of it. The Philistine women of whom we shall read were not warriors, but they were always the ensnarers of the Nazarite.

And who is the deliverer out of the hands of the Philistine? A Nazarite. (See our annotations on Numbers 6 of what the Nazarite is and represents. A careful perusal of that chapter is needed to understand the typical meaning of Samson.) Even so the heart knowledge of Christ, our blessed place in Him, as well as the practical life of separation unto which we are called, is the power which delivers from the evil of Philistinism. The Angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah and later also to Manoah. Her name is not given. He announces to her, who was barren, the birth of a son, who was to be a Nazarite unto God from the womb. The mother herself was to abstain from wine and strong drink and defilement with any unclean thing. The messenger, the Angel of the Lord, is the same who had come from Gilgal to Bochim, the Captain of the Lord's host, He who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Jehovah Himself. When asked what is thy Name? He answers: "It is Wonderful" (Isaiah 9:6). Then He ascended in the flame of the altar. Samson was born and Jehovah blessed him. The Spirit of the Lord even in his young days began to move him in Mahaneh-dan, the camp of Dan. (Dan means "judging.")

CHAPTER 14

The First Deeds of Samson

1. The woman in Timnath (14:1-4)
2. The killing of the young lion and the honey in the carcass (14:5-9)
3. The marriage feast and the riddle (14:10-14)
4. The riddle answered (14:15-18)
5. Thirty Philistines slain by Samson (14:19-20)

Samson was called of God to be a true Nazarite, but in his life which was to manifest the Nazarite character he failed. "He went down to Timnath" is a foreboding beginning. It was a step in the wrong direction. He stepped upon the territory of the enemy to enter into an alliance with the Philistines. He meets one of the daughters of the Philistines, a woman in Timnath. Two other women we find in Samson's life, an harlot of Gaza and Delilah. They are alike, representing the "wives of the devil." They lead him down and ultimately accomplish his downfall and death. Timnath means "portion assigned." He left his occupation to seek a portion with the Philistines. Yet it was of the Lord in the sense that He permitted it for a wise purpose. And in that wrong course he came to the vineyards of Timnath and met the roaring lion. The lion is the type of Satan (Amos 3:8; 1 Pet. 5:8). He roared at the Nazarite, as Satan still roars against any one who bears the marks of separation unto God. Then in the power of the Spirit who came upon Samson he rent the lion as a kid. Then he saw the woman and she

pleased him well. Strange contrast! In the power of the Spirit he tore the lion and then falls victim to the enemy in another form. How often this is the case in the experiences of God's people. Afterwards he found in the carcass of the lion the swarm of bees and the honey, which he ate and also gave to his parents. "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." Our blessed Lord has conquered Satan and as the result of that mighty overthrow and victory, accomplished on the Cross, we have our meat, our sweetness, our salvation and blessing.

Another application besides the above and also of the believer's personal experience in conquering by faith the enemy and receiving sweetness through it, has been suggested: "The occurrences which took place when Samson visited Timnath, the residence of the woman (the lion, and the honey afterwards found in the carcass), were highly significant, and adapted to instruct both him and his people. He seems himself to be aware, in some degree, of their importance, as he introduces them in his riddle. The lion, namely, is an image of the kingdoms of the world which are hostile to the kingdom of God; the attack, the struggle, and the victory thus acquire a symbolical meaning. The riddle also includes a truth of great importance, the evidence of which is furnished in manifold ways by the history of the world, and which admits of an appropriate application even to our times. The attack of the lion was an image of the Philistine invasion; the eater famished Israel with meat and sweetness, the destroyer brought salvation and blessings with him; for the yoke of the Philistines was a chastisement, designed to lead the people to repentance, and terminate in their renewed acceptableness before God."

Then he is in very bad company. He went down to Timnath alone. He met the woman, then he made a feast and was surrounded by thirty Philistines as companions. He had allied himself with the enemy. And this compromise, this mingling with the enemies of the cross of Christ, is the common thing today and has led to the grieving of the Spirit and the loss of power. "For example, the modern system of revival--to which our Samson, in his failure, so closely answers--in which, whilst there doubtless often is more or less of true faithful service, yet to effect the end an alliance even with the enemy is sought; the aid of the world is sought in obtaining deliverance from the world! Fleshly attractions, eloquent speakers, exquisite music, cunning schemes for gathering crowds to attract crowds; all the churches closed except one, thus awakening a natural excitement; all these are daughters of the Philistine, very fair, all serving religion and pleasing us well; but very, very dangerous. For whilst at first they may not appear serious, they point to the possibility of their becoming so in the future; nor do they ever radically aid, but always hinder, the Nazarite.

He gives the riddle to the Philistines and makes a wager. The woman, now Samson's wife, wept and continued till he told her the secret, "and she told the riddle to the children of her people." Here was his weak point, which eventually resulted in his shameful downfall and humiliating experience. He could not keep a secret. But it was all the results of his going down, forming an alliance with the enemy he was called to overcome. He did not see that he had stepped in the wrong direction. He blamed the Philistines and not himself. "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." Then he slew thirty Philistines to make good his promise and thus openly declared his hatred and antagonism to the enemy for the first time.

The Conflict with the Philistines: Bound Yet Free

1. The damage done to the Philistines (15:1-8)
2. Bound by his own brethren (15:9-13)
3. The deed with the jawbone (15:14-17)
4. His prayer and the answer (15:18-20)

He discovered next the true character of the Philistines. His wife has been given to another. Nothing came of his alliance with the Philistines but trouble and unpleasantness for himself. Was it of the Lord when he took the 300 foxes (literally, jackals; it would have been hard work to catch 300 foxes, for they go alone, but jackals go in packs) and the firebrands to destroy the corn, the vineyards and olive-groves? We find that there is no record that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him for this work. He acted out of revenge, because they had given his wife to another, whom as an Israelite with the Nazarite vow upon himself, he should never have taken. It was anger and not a judgment commanded by the Lord. And touching the jackal, an unclean beast, he had defiled himself. How often God's people act in the same way in an undignified manner, biting and devouring each other and like Samson destroying corn, vineyards and olives, the types of spiritual blessings. Whenever an unchristlike spirit manifests itself among the children of God, the spirit of malice, envy and vain-glory, the people of God are robbed of their joy and peace. The Philistines paid him in the same coin. They burnt his wife and her father. Then he slew the Philistines with a great slaughter and dwelt in the rock Etam (literally, the cleft of the rock). It was a safe place for him against "their ravening," the meaning of Etam. And we too have our safe place in the cleft of the rock. His own brethren bind him out of fear for the Philistines, but in the Spirit of the Lord he bursts now the new cords and with the jawbone of an ass he slew a thousand men. It is now faith which acts. It was a feeble thing he used; boasting was excluded. Nor was it his own physical strength which accomplished the deed, but the Spirit of the Lord, who had come upon him. The jawbone having done its work is cast away.

"He will not keep it. It might become a snare to him: Israel might go a whoring after it as after Gideon's ephod. It has served his purpose, now let it go--after all it is nothing more than the poor jawbone of a dead ass! Oh, that we could learn something from this! It is such a day to exalt the poor, foolish instruments that God, in His goodness, may use. Do not we everywhere hear what a wonderful man is such a man! What marvellous power in the gospel! What beauty of exposition! What magnetism! What a smart man is he! Yes, indeed, just as well might Samson say, 'What a powerful jawbone! What a wonderful jawbone! What a magnetic jawbone!' No, no, put the poor jawbone where it belongs, lest it detract from the glory of Him to whom all glory alone is due." (F.C. Jennings, Notes on judges.)

Then after the victory he thirsts and God cleaves a place in Lehi. "God clave the hollow that was in Lehi" and water flows forth to refresh him. A beautiful picture of Him who was smitten that the refreshing waters of life may flow forth.

CHAPTER 16

Delilah, and Samson

1. In Gaza (16:1-3)

2. Delilah and her victory over him (16:4-20)
3. The captive of the Philistines (16:21)
4. The feast of Dagon and Samson's death (16:22-31)

Down he goes again, and this time to Gaza, the Philistine stronghold. There he unites himself with a harlot. We are here reminded of the history of the Church. The harlot typifies that system which in Revelation is called by the same name, she who seduces to commit fornication, Babylon the great, Rome. Rome is the capital of Philistinism, ritualistic Christendom, as Gaza was the capital of the Philistines. But the attempt of the Philistines to kill him fails. He carries the gates, posts and bars of the city and took them to the top of the hill before Hebron. We may see in it a little picture of the recovery from the power of the harlot in the Reformation movement. But it was not Samson's last visit and farewell to Gaza. We shall see him there again, stripped of his power, his eyes put out, a ridiculed captive. We find him first at Sorek. He is entangled with Delilah, which means "exhausted." He loves her and she becomes the fearful instrument of his downfall. She is the type of the world, the fair, pleasure-loving, religious world, which aims, like Delilah, to rob the true Nazarite of his separation, the real power of the Christian life. It would take pages to describe the subtleties, the cunning ways, the wiles of the fair Delilah of the last days. And even then we would have to say "not the half has been told." And how she presses upon the Nazarite! Again and again he deceives her and keeps his secret. He knows well she is after his destruction. Like a moth attracted to the light though burning awaits it, he goes back to the dangerous sport, till at last, vexed unto death, he tells her his secret. Again he sleeps upon her knees. The locks of hair fall under the razor. Then she, the fair Delilah, afflicts him. Her caresses become blows and his strength went from him. "And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him." Alas! the sad story, how it has been repeated in the individual experiences of many believers. Flirting with the unholy principles of this present evil age is a dangerous thing. Loving the world will end, if unchecked, in disaster for the child of God. And the remedy is the close walk in heart dependence and heart devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus it has happened and still more happens in our days with the Church. Stripped of her strength, her confessed weakness, lowliness, separation and utter dependence on the Lord, the Philistines have come upon her, lulled to sleep by Delilah's wiles. There is a shaking too, like Samson's shaking. Efforts are made by a powerless Church and they do not know that the power is no longer there, for the Spirit is grieved and quenched. That is the sad state of the professing Church as seen in those of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-17).

Oh, the sad picture of the Nazarite shorn of his locks, naked in this sense; eyes put out, blind, bound in fetters, grinding in the mill! What sport the Philistines had with him! And is a Church robbed of power, naked and blind, not a sadder spectacle? The end of Samson was a great victory. He had learned his lessons. Thoroughly humbled and chastised he must have repented of all his sin and folly. His hair grew again. He cries to Jehovah between the pillars, where he made sport. Then follows his prayer. "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me; I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." Then he bowed himself, and an awful catastrophe follows when the house collapsed and he and the vast multitude of Philistines were slain and buried in the ruins.

III. THE APPENDIX: ISRAEL'S INTERNAL CORRUPTION

Micah's and Dan's Idolatry and Its Punishment

CHAPTER 17

The Images Made and the Hired Priest

1. The stolen money restored and the images (17:1-6)
2. The Levite hired for a priest (17:7-13)

The last five chapters of the book form an appendix. The events given did not occur after Samson's death, but they happened many years before. These chapters are not in chronological order but arranged in this way to teach the root of the evil and its results. This answers much, if not all, of the objections of the critics. These chapters reveal the internal corruption which existed in Israel during the different declensions. Idolatry and lawlessness are the two characteristic features. True worship and dependence on God is given up and then follows the dreadful fruit of this, which is hatred, strife culminating in lawlessness. The predictions in the New Testament reveal the same two phases. Departure from the faith is followed by moral corruption (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-4). Then we find in these chapters a statement which does not appear elsewhere in the book. "There was no king in Israel" is the statement made four times (17:6; 18:1, 19:1; 21:25). A king was needed to remedy these sad internal conditions, this departure from God and strife of one against the other. This is an evident link with and preparation for the history which follows. Even so in this age of evil, darkness and cunning lawlessness; what the world needs is a king, the King of Righteousness and Peace. When He comes, order will be brought out of chaos, all strife and war, all bloodshed and lawlessness will cease.

Into what a scene this chapter introduces us! The thieving son, the cursing mother. He, for the fear of the curse (true faith was not there, but superstition), restores the money and that ungodly woman can say, "Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son." Then she used two hundred shekels of silver and has two images made. Micah, whose wicked life belies his name (Micah means "who is like Jehovah"), had a house full of gods, made an ephod, teraphim and then "ordained" one of his sons for a priest. Then a wandering Levite passed by and to make his idolatrous worship a little more "religious" he hires the Levite to be a "father" and "a priest." He also promises him a yearly salary, his board and clothing. Then he settled down and said, "Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest."

There is no need of much comment. The typical application is seen at a glance. Here is a man-made god, a man-made worship and a man-made priest. Such is the state of ritualistic Christendom. Much of that which is called worship is simply man-made and dishonors God as much, or even more, than the idolatry of heathendom. And how the false priesthood is here typified! We have but one Priest as the people of God and that is our gracious Lord. Through His infinite grace all true believers are constituted priests with Him. We are a holy and a royal priesthood. Any other priesthood is man-made and a wicked assumption which has corrupted and is corrupting Christianity. The hirelings too are represented in this scene. Religious service is so much reduced to a commercial basis. And there is the delusion of thinking

that the Lord must surely bless and give prosperity.

The Levite himself is another sign of the times. He is of the Levites of Judah, has been for a while in Bethlehem-judah and wandered away again to find, where he may, another temporary resting place. His is the restless foot of a stranger where he might have claimed inheritance, and he is ready to find a home where he should have been a stranger. Little solicitation prevails with him: his sustenance, a suit of clothes, a salary, has prevailed with many in all ages of the world, and the Levite exchanges his ministry for priesthood in the house of Micah, where the idolatry of the place is sanctified with Jehovah's name. All this is simple enough to read by those that care, and Christendom has exhibited every detail of this transformation--not, alas, as it would seem, a long process: a manufactured priesthood for manufactured gods, all covered with a fair name of orthodoxy, and men doing with great satisfaction what is right in their own eyes!

CHAPTER 18

The Danite Idolatry

1. The Danites seek an inheritance (18:1-12)
2. Their robbery (18:13-26)
3. Laish taken and idolatry consummated (18:27-31)

The history of this chapter is closely linked with the preceding. The tribe of Dan had failed to take the God-given inheritance (Josh. 19:40-46). "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Judges 1:34). Then in self-will, entirely disregarding the will of God, they sent out spies to seek another inheritance. They meet Micah's priest, the hireling. Micah's idolatrous outfit including the hired priest are taken by the invaders. The hireling sees an advantage for himself, his "usefulness" is enlarged for filthy lucre's sake. Then they killed the people of Laish and set their city on fire. The whole tribe of Dan becomes idolatrous. We have in all a picture of complete apostasy.

2. Israel's Moral Condition and the War on Benjamin

CHAPTER 19

The Levite and His Concubine

1. The Levite and the unfaithful woman (19:1-21)
2. The fate of the concubine (19:22-30)

The results of departure from God are now revealed in the awful corruption and violence so faithfully recorded in this chapter. The moral condition of Israel has gone down to the same level of the Canaanites; they sank even lower than the nations whom God had doomed to destruction. We do not repeat the horrible details of this deed of lust and violence. Apostasy from God, rejection of the truth is followed by moral corruption. Romans 1:26-32 shows the vileness of the Gentiles, who turned their backs to the light and did not glorify God. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 contains the description of the moral corruption of the last days of the present age, the conditions of those who claim to be "religious" and yet are apostates. The days of Lot,

with their vileness, are to precede the coming of the Son of Man (Luke 17:28-30). Evidences that such moral corruption and violence exist today throughout professing Christendom are only too numerous.

CHAPTER 20

The Horrible War

1. The Levite's story (20:1-7)
2. The uprising (20:8-11)
3. The slaying of the Israelites (20:12-25)
4. Benjamin exterminated except six hundred men (20:26-48)

This and the concluding chapter bring before us the awful harvest of what had been sown. "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). They had sown the wind and now reaped the whirlwind. Violence and lawlessness result in the slaying of 40,000 Israelites and 23,000 of the tribe of Benjamin. Nearly the entire tribe was wiped out. From Dan to Beersheba into the land of Gilead they gathered at Mizpeh to hear the story of the Levite. Benjamin refused to give up the wicked men and instead of humbling themselves, acknowledging the dreadful guilt and bringing the guilty ones to judgment, they gathered themselves together to fight their own brethren. Their company was small in comparison with the mighty host of Israel. The divine counsel was that Judah should go up first to battle with Benjamin. What a contrast with the beginning of the book! There they were to fight against the common foe; here against their own brethren.

"But to be fit to be used of God to deal with evil involves much more than readiness to be His instrument. They are too ready, as we see in the result. Their wrath is too prompt, too implacable, too unsparing. Theirs is the reckless haste of vengeance, and not the solemn discrimination of divine judgment. They remember not their own sins, bring no sin offering to God, no tears of penitence. They build on their numbers; no doubt on the justice of their cause, also, but in self-righteousness and without self-suspicion. Thus they go up to smite, and they are smitten heavily, disastrously. Benjamin, the wrong-doer, is wholly victorious."

Here too are the lessons for God's people in judging what is evil amongst them. Then the children of Israel went to Bethel (House of God) and with prayer and fasting waited on the Lord and brought the offerings. Then the Lord gave them the assurance of victory. Benjamin is smitten, their women and children are wiped out. Only six hundred men escaped to the rock of Rimmon. All their cities were burned.

To even greater scenes of violence, bloodshed and desolation this poor world, which has rejected God and His beloved Son, is hastening on.

CHAPTER 21

The Repentance About Benjamin

1. Sorrow of the people and Jabesh-Gilead smitten (21:1-15)
2. The restoration of Benjamin (21:16-25)

A tribe of the nation was almost entirely exterminated. Then the oath they had made not to give their daughters to wife to the Benjamites left assured the complete extinction of the tribe. The dreadful work they had

done dawned suddenly upon them and weeping before Jehovah they said, "Why is this come to pass in Israel that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?" The answer surely was, it came to pass on account of their departure from God and their sins. Thus people ask when they behold the scenes of bloodshed and war, as we see in our times, why is this? and are even ready to blame God, instead of thinking of sin and its curse. Then once more they acted themselves and committed another deed of violence. Jabesh-Gilead is destroyed; only four hundred virgins are saved. These were given to the Benjamites. But what hypocrisy they showed in having a feast of Jehovah and commanding the Benjamites to steal the daughters of Shiloh! Failure and decline is written in this book. God's faithfulness towards His people whom He loves is not less prominent.

"This is Israel, the people of God: infirm and wavering where good is to be accomplished; quick and decisive where patience and forbearance would become them; tolerant of what is only of themselves; scrupulously keeping an insane oath, yet managing to evade it by a jesuitry that deceives no one. Such is the people of God, and such is Christendom today; and such it has been. Let us search our hearts as we read the record,--not given as a record without purpose in it. How solemn is the repetition at the end of what has been the text of these closing chapters: 'In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did what was right in his own eyes'" (Numerical Bible).

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