LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE ONE

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD

Scripture Reading: Judg. 1:1-2; 2:11—3:11; 21:25; Acts 13:19-20

As we begin the life-study of Judges, I have the burden to speak a word concerning the intrinsic significance of this book.

In order to understand the history in the Old Testament, we need the full scope of the Scriptures. If we read the Old Testament according to this full scope, we will realize that at Mount Sinai God married Israel. In His concept and desire, He wanted to be to Israel as a husband to a wife, and He expected Israel to act as a wife toward Him. We need to keep this point in mind as we read the book of Judges.

In writing the books of history, Samuel put Judges after Joshua to show us what kind of life Israel lived toward her Husband. For some reason, she did not have a heart to be the wife of Jehovah. As a wife, she forgot her Husband, left her Husband, and acted according to her own desires. Eventually, Israel became a harlot. At the time of Hosea, Israel was a harlot in the eyes of God (Hosea 1:2; 2:2). Having fallen into the sin of adultery, she did not have a definite husband. In addition to Jehovah as her Husband, she had many other men. This was the situation of Israel in the book of Judges. In the book of Judges there is a terrible picture of a wife forsaking her Husband and not even acknowledging His existence. This is an ugly picture of a harlot, a wife who forsook her Husband and went after idols.

In the beginning Israel had a bridal love toward God, but after her marriage she lost her position as a chaste wife to her husband. She forsook God and went to idols. Every idol was a "man," and Israel became full of idols. Jeremiah 11:13

says that according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem the people had set up altars to burn incense to their idols. Ezekiel 16:24 tells us that Israel made "a high place in every street." This means that there was an idol on every street. This corresponds to the New Testament, which shows us another great harlot in Revelation 17, the Roman Catholic Church, which is the mother of many harlots. Since the mother of the harlots is the apostate Roman Church, the harlots, the daughters of the apostate church, must be all the sects and groups in Christianity that hold to some extent the teachings, practices, and traditions of the apostate Roman Church.

In the book of Judges, a particular saying is repeated a number of times: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). But God was the King! According to the principle in the Bible, the husband is the head of the marriage and the head of the family. In creation God ordained that the man would have this authority; therefore, he also has the kingship. In typology and in figure, God is the unique man. We all are females because we, the church, are the corporate wife to Christ. Since God is our Creator and our Lord, He should also be our King.

When Israel said that there was no king among them, this meant that they had annulled God and His status. In the book of 1 Samuel, the children of Israel asked God to appoint a king for them (8:5). This was a great offense to God (v. 7). Even though Israel was a wife to God, she became a harlot. She did not recognize God's kingship, and she did not recognize God as her Husband. Therefore, the children of Israel did what was right in their own eyes, and as a result they became rotten and corrupted.

This is what we see in the book of Judges. The history in this book is thus a history of rottenness. After the story of Judah and Caleb in 1:1-20, Israel's history as recorded in Judges was full of the rottenness and corruption of a harlot. This is the intrinsic significance of the book of Judges.

I would now like to give a brief introductory word to our study of Judges.

I. JOSHUA BEING THE BOOK OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY FULL OF MARVELOUS VICTORIES AND JUDGES BEING THE BOOK OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY FULL OF MISERABLE DEFEATS

We need to see the contrast between the books of Joshua and Judges. Joshua is the book of Israel's history full of the marvelous victories over the inhabitants of Canaan in the presence of Jehovah. Judges, on the contrary, is the book of Israel's history full of miserable defeats under their enemies in the forsaking of Jehovah.

II. THE WRITER

The writer of the book of Judges probably was Samuel. Many expositors of the Scriptures hold this view.

III. THE TIME

The time covered in Judges comprises about 305 years, from about 1425 B.C. (after Joshua's death—1:1) to 1120 B.C. (at the death of Samson—16:30-31; cf. Acts 13:19-20). The following list is the chronological sequence according to history:

1. 2:6-9about 1426 B.C.
2. 1:1-36"1425 B.C.
3. 2:1-5"1425 B.C.
4. 2:10-13
5. Chs. 17—21"1406 B.C.

(Ruth"1322-1312 B.C.)

6. 2:14—16:31"? -1120 B.C.

IV. THE PLACE

The place of Judges was Canaan.

V. THE CONTENT

The content of Judges consists of the children of Israel trusting in God, forsaking God, being defeated by their enemies, being delivered through the judges, and becoming corrupted (1:1-2; 2:11—3:11). When the children of Israel, who had trusted in God, forsook God, they were defeated by their enemies. Because of their miserable situation, they repented,

and the Lord mercifully raised up judges to deliver them. However, after the children of Israel were delivered, they became corrupted. All this became a cycle that was repeated over and over in Judges.

VI. THE CENTRAL THOUGHT

The central thought of the book of Judges is that Israel forsook God, suffered defeat by their enemies, and became rotten; and since there was no king among them, everyone did that which was right in his own eyes (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

VII. THE SECTIONS

The book of Judges has three sections: Israel's trusting in God (1:1—2:5); Israel's forsaking of God (comprising their suffering of defeats, their repentance, and God's deliverance (2:6—16:31); and Israel's becoming corrupted (17:1—21:25).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE TWO

THE BEAUTIFUL SCENE OF ISRAEL'S TRUSTING IN GOD

Scripture Reading: Judg. 1

In this message we will consider chapter one of Judges. This chapter describes the beautiful scene of Israel's trusting in God.

I. JUDAH'S BOLDNESS AND VICTORY

In verses 1 through 21 we see Judah's boldness and victory.

A. Inquiring of Jehovah and Jehovah's Answer and Promise

After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel inquired of Jehovah concerning who would go up for them first against the Canaanites in order to fight against them (v. 1). Jehovah gave His answer and promise, saying, "Judah shall go up. Behold, I have given the land into his hand" (v. 2). This marvelous picture of oneness with the Lord, of the organic union of God with His people, is a continuation of the oneness in the book of Joshua when the people of Israel first entered into the good land.

B. Judah and Simeon His Brother's Coordination

"Judah said to Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, and we will fight against the Canaanites; and I will also go with you into your lot. And Simeon went with him" (v. 3). Here we see a wonderful coordination between two tribes—Judah, the strongest tribe, and Simeon, a weak tribe.

C. Judah Going Up, and Jehovah Giving the Canaanites and the Perizzites into Their Hand

According to verses 4 through 10, Judah went up, and

Jehovah gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they struck ten thousand of them in Bezek. Then the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it, striking it with the edge of the sword and setting it on fire. Afterward they went down to fight against the Canaanites who inhabited the hill country and the southland and the lowland.

D. Caleb's Victory over Hebron through His Son-in-law Othniel

This chapter also speaks of Caleb's victory over Hebron through his son-in-law Othniel (vv. 11-15, 20). The name *Othniel* means "lion of God." Caleb said that to whomever struck Kiriath-sepher and took it he would give Achsah his daughter as wife. Othniel took Kiriath-sepher, and Caleb gave him Achsah as wife. She spoke to her father, saying, "Give me a blessing, for you have given me the southland; give me also springs of water" (v. 15a). So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. Verse 20 tells us that Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had spoken, and that Caleb dispossessed the three sons of Anak from there.

E. Judah Fighting, with Simeon His Brother, and Utterly Destroying the Canaanites

Judah fought, with Simeon his brother, and utterly destroyed the Canaanites, and Jehovah was with Judah. They took possession of the hill country, but they were not able to dispossess the inhabitants of the valley, for they had chariots of iron (vv. 16-19).

F. The Children of Benjamin Not Dispossessing the Jebusites

The children of Benjamin did not dispossess the Jebusites, who dwelt in Jerusalem. Rather, the Jebusites continued to dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem (v. 21). This indicates that even though Judah was bold and victorious, his victory was not absolute, for there was a shortage in not dispossessing the inhabitants of the valley and in not dispossessing the Jebusites.

II. THE HOUSE OF JOSEPH GOING UP TO FIGHT AGAINST BETHEL

The house of Joseph went up to fight against Bethel, and Jehovah was with them. First, they spied out Bethel. When those who watched saw a man coming out of the city, they told him that if he showed them the entrance of the city, they would be merciful to him. He showed them the entrance, and they struck the people of the city with their sword, but they let the man and all his family go (vv. 22-26).

III. SOME DEFECTS

Although this chapter portrays the beautiful scene of Israel's trusting in God, this chapter nevertheless describes some defects (vv. 27-36).

A. Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali Not Dispossessing the Canaanites

When Israel became strong, they made the Canaanites forced labor, but they did not utterly dispossess them (v. 28). Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali did not dispossess the Canaanites, who persisted in dwelling in their lands and became forced labor (vv. 27, 29-33).

B. The Amorites Pushing the Children of Dan into the Hill Country

The Amorites pushed the children of Dan into the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the valley. The Amorites persisted in dwelling with them, but the house of Joseph prevailed so that they became forced labor (vv. 34-36).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE THREE

THE MISERABLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S FORSAKING OF GOD

CHAPTERS 2—16

(1)

Scripture Reading: Judg. 2:1—3:6

In this message we will consider 2:1—3:6. Before we come to these verses, I would like to say a word concerning the intrinsic significance of this portion of the Word.

We have seen that at Mount Sinai God entered into a marriage union with Israel and that He wanted her to remain in the most intimate contact with Him in this marvelous marriage union. But Israel rejected God as her Husband and as her King and "went about as harlots after other gods and worshipped them" (2:17). In dealing with this situation, the King became a servant, as the Angel of Jehovah, to admonish the children of Israel (vv. 1-5).

The Angel of Jehovah is spoken of throughout the Old Testament, from Exodus 3 through Zechariah 3. The Angel of Jehovah is also mentioned in Judges 2 and 6. The word *angel* is capitalized in these instances because this Angel is a particular Angel. The Angel of Jehovah is just God Himself in His Divine Trinity serving His elect as a Servant.

When Moses was being called by God to lead Israel out of Egypt, the calling Jehovah became the Angel of Jehovah. In Exodus 3 the names *Jehovah* and *the Angel of Jehovah* are used interchangeably (vv. 2, 4). The embodiment of the Triune God is Christ, and Christ is the Angel of Jehovah, who took care of Israel as the acting Jehovah in the Old Testament. Christ is the acting God, not a silent, passive God. For Christ to be the Angel of Jehovah means that God

has appointed and commissioned Himself in His Divine Trinity to act in caring for His people.

Because Israel did not act as a proper wife, the very Jehovah who was the Husband, the Head, and the King of Israel became a Servant to His wife. This means that He did not come to her as a Husband, Head, or King but came to her as the Angel of Jehovah, who was sent by Jehovah (Zech. 2:9-11). Since Israel did not consider Jehovah as the Head, He became a Servant to serve her. His admonition in Judges 2 was the admonition of a servant.

With respect to Christ as the Angel of Jehovah, let us review what is revealed concerning Christ in the four Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew Christ is presented as the King, and in the Gospel of Mark the King is presented as a Slave. The King-Savior thus became a Slave-Savior. In the Gospel of Luke the Slave-Savior is presented as a Man-Savior in His human virtues with the divine attributes. However, He is more than just a man; He is also God. Therefore, in the Gospel of John He is presented as God (1:1). He is the eternal God who became flesh (v. 14). Our Savior, therefore, is a God-man, who is both a King and a Slave. This is the intrinsic significance of the four Gospels.

Our God wants to save us and be our King, and we need to acknowledge Him as our Head and King. In order to save us, however, the King had to become a Servant and a Slave. As a Slave He is both God and man. He is a man, but His substance, His very essence, is God.

In His divinity God is our King and Head. Because our situation was so poor, the King had to become a Servant to serve us. The Servant sent by God in Judges 2 was actually Jehovah Himself in His acting situation. He did not come to rebuke or command; rather, He came to admonish and to take care of Israel. This is the significance of the Angel of Jehovah in Judges 2.

Having seen the intrinsic significance of 2:1—3:6, let us now consider this portion in some detail.

I. THE ADMONITION OF THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH

In 2:1-5 we have the admonition of the Angel of Jehovah,

who, as we have seen, is Christ as the acting Jehovah in the Old Testament taking care of Israel (Exo. 3:2-10; 14:19; Judg. 6:21).

A. Reminding Israel

In verses 1 and 2a the Angel of Jehovah reminded Israel of three matters. First, He reminded them of Jehovah's delivering them out from Egypt and His bringing them into the promised land (v. 1a). Second, He reminded them of Jehovah's faithfulness in keeping His promise to them (v. 1b). Third, He reminded them of Jehovah's charge to them that they should not make a covenant with the inhabitants of Canaan and that they should tear down their altars (v. 2a).

B. Warning Israel

In verses 2b and 3 the Angel of Jehovah gave a warning to Israel. First, He told them that they had not listened to His voice, and then He asked them concerning what they had done (v. 2b). Because Israel did not listen to Him, He went on to say that He would not drive the Canaanites out from before them, but they would be like thorns in Israel's sides, and the gods of the Canaanites would be a snare to Israel (v. 3).

C. Israel's Reaction to the Words of the Angel of Jehovah

Verse 4 tells us Israel's reaction to the words of the Angel of Jehovah. The people lifted up their voice and wept. Thus, they called the name of that place Bochim, and there they offered to Jehovah (v. 5).

II. THE REASON FOR ISRAEL'S FORSAKING OF GOD

In verses 6 through 10 we see the reason for Israel's forsaking of God.

A. Because of the Death of Joshua, of the Elders, and of the Generation Who Saw All the Great Work of Jehovah That He Had Done for Israel

When Joshua sent the people away, each of the children of Israel went to his own inheritance. The people served

Jehovah throughout all the days of Joshua and throughout all the days of the elders whose days extended after Joshua and who saw all the great work of Jehovah that He had done for Israel. Eventually, all that generation died. The death of Joshua, of the elders, and of that entire generation was the reason for Israel's forsaking of God (vv. 6-10a).

B. Because the Present Generation Did Not Know Jehovah or the Work That He Had Done for Israel

Also, "another generation," the present generation, who did not know Jehovah or the work that He had done for Israel, rose up after them (v. 10b).

III. THE CYCLE OF THE MISERABLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S FORSAKING OF GOD

Verses 11 through 20 are a record of the cycle of the miserable history of Israel's forsaking of God.

A. Israel's Forsaking of Jehovah and Turning to the Idols of the Canaanites

The children of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Jehovah, serving the idols of the Canaanites (vv. 11-13). They forsook Jehovah, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they followed after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who surrounded them.

B. Jehovah's Anger Burning against Israel

The anger of Jehovah burned against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of plunderers and sold them into the hand of their enemies around them (vv. 14-15). Whenever the children of Israel went out, the hand of Jehovah was against them for evil.

C. Israel's Groaning and Jehovah's Pity on Them in Raising Up Judges to Save Them from the Hand of Their Enemies

Israel groaned because of those who oppressed them and crushed them, and Jehovah was moved to pity and raised

up judges to save them from the hand of their enemies (vv. 16-18).

D. After the Death of the Judge, Israel Turning and Acting More Corruptly by Following After Other Gods

When the judge raised up by Jehovah died, the people of Israel turned and acted more corruptly than their fathers by following after other gods in order to serve them and worship them. They did not cease from any of their practices or from their stubborn way (v. 19).

E. The Anger of Jehovah Burning Again against Israel

When the people turned and acted more corruptly, the anger of Jehovah burned again against Israel (v. 20).

IV. JEHOVAH'S TESTING OF ISRAEL

In 2:21—3:6 we have Jehovah's testing of Israel.

A. By the Nations Who Were Left after Joshua's Death

Jehovah tested Israel by the nations who were left after Joshua's death (2:21—3:4). Because Israel transgressed Jehovah's covenant and did not listen to His voice, Jehovah said that He would no longer dispossess from before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died. His purpose in not dispossessing the nations was to test Israel through them as to whether they would keep the way of Jehovah by walking in it, as their fathers kept it. Thus, these nations "were for the testing of Israel, to know whether they would listen to the commandments of Jehovah, which He commanded their fathers through Moses" (3:4).

B. By Israel's Failure

According to verses 5 and 6, Israel failed in three matters: in dwelling among the Canaanites (v. 5); in taking the daughters of the Canaanites as their wives and giving their

own daughters to the sons of the Canaanites (v. 6a); and in serving the gods of the Canaanites (v. 6b).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE FOUR

THE MISERABLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S FORSAKING OF GOD CHAPTERS 2—16

(2)

THE FIRST THREE CYCLES OF THE MISERABLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

Scripture Reading: Judg. 3:7—5:31

Before we come to 3:7—5:31, I have the burden to speak a word concerning the intrinsic significance of this portion of Judges.

Prior to the history recorded in these chapters, the people of Israel had never had a female leader. Then, suddenly, God raised up a female, Deborah, as a judge of Israel. Regarding this, we need to realize that in the Bible, whenever God does something which stands out as being extraordinary, it is very significant. It indicates, first, man's failure, and then, God's excellent act. At the time of Judges 4, all the men of Israel had failed, so God raised up a woman. That raising up of a female changed the entire condition of Israel.

In the Bible a proper female indicates one who is in submission to God, one who keeps God's ordination. This is the position that Israel should have taken before God, but the situation in Israel had become fully abnormal. The men had left their position before Jehovah. Hence, Israel violated God's ordination, leaving her position as God's wife and forsaking Him for hundreds of idols. This brought Israel into a miserable situation and condition.

According to God's creation, Deborah was a very capable person. By reading her song in chapter five, we can see that she was full of ability, capacity, insight, and foresight. But

such an excellent person was very submissive. God made her the leader, yet she kept the proper order and took Barak as her covering (4:6-9). She realized that she needed a man to be her covering. Actually, Barak did nearly nothing, yet Deborah took him as her "head covering." When she took this kind of standing, the whole nation became different. In their miserable situation no one would take the lead to fight for Jehovah's interest, and no one would be willing to follow. But when this excellent, extraordinary woman took the lead to practice the female submission to the man, the entire country came into the proper order. Everyone returned to his or her proper position. Thus Deborah could say in her song, "Then a remnant of the nobles went down; / The people of Jehovah went down with me against the mighty" (5:13). All the leaders took the lead, and all the people followed; the army was formed. At first, only some of the people followed, but eventually they all followed. From this we see that the entire country came into an excellent order, assuming the proper position before Jehovah.

Judges 5:15-16 speaks of "great resolutions in heart" and "great searchings of heart." In Israel's miserable situation, no one was searching his heart. But the people needed a great searching of their hearts, and they needed to make great resolutions in their hearts to rise up and follow the others to fight for God's kingdom.

We may apply this to our practice of the vital groups today. For the vital groups we need much prayer with repentance. In our prayer spontaneously the searching of the heart comes to us. This issues in a resolve to live for the Lord and to fight for the Lord according to the present need in His recovery. In particular, we need to make a resolution before the Lord concerning gaining persons for His increase. This is "great resolutions in heart."

Judges 3:12-13 says that Jehovah strengthened Israel's enemies, but 4:6-16 reveals that Jehovah was fighting for Israel. This shows that God is a God of incarnation. God wants man to match Him so that He can move. If Israel had not fought, God would not have fought for them. However, because Israel did fight under Deborah in a proper order, God

fought for them. The principle is the same with us today. If we do not go out to gain sinners, God will not go, but if we go, God also will go. However, this kind of going out needs a searching of our heart and a resolution in our heart. God will not work until we become active in this searching of our heart and making resolutions in our heart. This is the way to fight the battle; this is the way to preach the gospel; and this is the way to gain sinners to become members of Christ.

Judges 5:31b says, "May those who love Him be like the sun / When it rises in its might." For the sun to rise in its might means that it shines brightly, brilliantly, and gloriously. We need the searchings, the resolutions, and the rising up to shine like the sun. If all the churches would be like this, they surely would enjoy the victory. May all the dear saints in the Lord's recovery have great searchings and make great resolutions, and may they all, by loving the Lord, rise up like the sun to shine brightly.

Let us now consider the first three cycles of the miserable history of Israel in 3:7—5:31.

I. THE FIRST CYCLE

The record of the first cycle is given in 3:7-11a.

A. Israel's Evil in Forsaking Jehovah

The children of Israel did evil in forsaking Jehovah to serve the Baalim and the Asheroth (v. 7).

B. Jehovah's Anger Burning against Israel

Because Israel did what was evil in the sight of Jehovah, His anger burned against them (v. 8a).

C. Jehovah Selling Israel into the Hand of the King of Mesopotamia

Jehovah sold Israel into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, and Israel served him eight years (v. 8b).

D. Israel Crying Out to Jehovah

The children of Israel cried out to Jehovah (v. 9a).

E. Jehovah Raising Up a Savior

Jehovah raised up a savior, Othniel the son of Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, and he saved Israel from Cushan-rishathaim (vv. 9b-10).

F. The Land Having Rest Forty Years

The end of the first cycle was that the land had rest forty years (v. 11a).

II. THE SECOND CYCLE

In 3:11b-31 we have the second cycle of Israel's miserable history.

A. Othniel, the Judge, Dying

In verse 11b we are told that Othniel, the judge, died.

B. Israel Again Doing That Which Was Evil in the Sight of Jehovah

After the death of Othniel, the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah (v. 12a).

C. Jehovah Strengthening Eglon King of Moab against Israel

Because Israel did that which was evil in His sight, Jehovah strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel. Eglon gathered the children of Ammon and Amalek to himself and went and struck Israel, taking possession of the city of palms (vv. 12b-13).

D. Israel Serving Eglon King of Moab Eighteen Years

Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years (v. 14).

E. Israel Crying to Jehovah, and Jehovah Raising Up a Savior for Them

Israel cried to Jehovah, and Jehovah raised up a savior for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjaminite (v. 15a).

F. Ehud Killing Eglon King of Moab and Defeating the Moabites

Ehud killed Eglon king of Moab by a scheme, and then he defeated the Moabites with the children of Israel from the hill country of Ephraim, killing about ten thousand Moabites (vv. 15b-29).

G. Moab Being Subdued by Israel, and the Land Having Rest Eighty Years

Moab was subdued that day by Israel, and the land had rest eighty years (v. 30).

H. Shamgar the Son of Anath Also Saving Israel

After Ehud there was Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck six hundred Philistines with an ox goad. He also saved Israel (v. 31).

III. THE THIRD CYCLE

Chapters four and five are a record of the third cycle.

A. Israel Again Doing That Which Was Evil in the Sight of Jehovah after Ehud Died

The children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah after Ehud died (4:1).

B. Jehovah Selling Israel into the Hand of Jabin King of Canaan

Jehovah sold Israel into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, the captain of whose army was Sisera. He had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed Israel severely for twenty years (vv. 2, 3b).

C. Israel Crying Out to Jehovah

The children of Israel cried out to Jehovah (v. 3a).

D. Deborah, a Prophetess, Being Raised Up as a Judge of Israel

Deborah, a prophetess, was raised up as a judge of Israel.

She would sit under the palm of Deborah, and the children of Israel went up to her for judgment (vv. 4-5).

E. Deborah, with Barak and the Children of Naphtali and Zebulun, Defeating Jabin King of Canaan

Deborah, with Barak and the children of Naphtali and Zebulun, defeated Jabin the king of Canaan and the captain of his army, Sisera, through Jehovah's fighting for them (vv. 6-16). Verse 15a says, "Jehovah threw Sisera and all his chariots and all his camp into confusion with the edge of the sword before Barak."

F. Sisera, the Captain of King Jabin's Army, Being Killed by Jael

In verse 9 Deborah prophesied that Jehovah would sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. In verses 17 through 22 Sisera, the captain of King Jabin's army, was killed by Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, as Deborah had predicted.

G. God Subduing Jabin King of Canaan before the Children of Israel

God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the children of Israel. They prevailed more and more against Jabin until they destroyed him (vv. 23-24).

H. The Song of Deborah and Barak

Judges 5:1-31a is the song of Deborah and Barak.

1. Celebrating Triumphantly Their Victory over Jabin King of Canaan

Verses 4 and 5 say, "O Jehovah, when You went forth from Seir, / When You marched from the field of Edom; / The earth trembled, the heavens also dripped, / Indeed the clouds dripped water. / The mountains quaked at the presence of Jehovah, / Sinai there, at the presence of Jehovah, the God of Israel." Here Deborah and Barak celebrated triumphantly their victory over Jabin king of Canaan, given to them by God.

2. Appreciating the Leaders of Israel Who Took the Lead and the People of Israel Who Willingly Offered Themselves

Deborah and Barak appreciated the leaders of Israel who took the lead and the people of Israel who willingly offered themselves, some of whom had great resolutions in their heart and great searchings of their heart (vv. 2, 9, 13-18).

3. Praising the Stars That Fought with Sisera from Heaven, from Their Courses

The song of Deborah and Barak also praises the stars that fought with Sisera from heaven, from their courses, and the ancient river Kishon that swept away the kings of Canaan (vv. 20-21).

4. Praising the Angel of Jehovah, Christ, Who Took Care of Their Battle

"Curse Meroz, says the Angel of Jehovah; / Bitterly curse its inhabitants. / For they did not come to the aid of Jehovah, / To the aid of Jehovah against the mighty" (v. 23). Here the song praises the Angel of Jehovah, Christ, who took care of their battle.

5. Blessing Jael, the Wife of Heber the Kenite

In verses 24 through 27 the song of Deborah and Barak blesses Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who killed Sisera, the captain of the army of Jabin, king of Canaan. Verse 24 says, "Blessed among women shall Jael be, / The wife of Heber the Kenite; / Blessed among the women in the tent shall she be."

6. Mocking Ironically the Imagination of the Mother of Sisera concerning Her Son's Good Fortune

Verses 28 through 30 continue by mocking ironically the imagination of the mother of Sisera concerning her son's good fortune.

7. Blessing Israel

Verse 31a is a blessing upon Israel: "May all your enemies so perish, O Jehovah. / But may those who love Him be like the sun / When it rises in its might."

I. The Land Having Rest Forty Years

Chapter five concludes by saying that the land had rest forty years (v. 31b).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE FIVE

THE MISERABLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S FORSAKING OF GOD CHAPTERS 2—16

(3)

THE FOURTH CYCLE OF ISRAEL'S MISERABLE HISTORY

Scripture Reading: Judg. 6:1—8:32

After considering 6:1—8:32 before the Lord, I believe that the way to present the intrinsic significance of this portion of Judges is to present, first, the secret of Gideon's success and then the secret of his failure.

Gideon, a marvelous judge who was called by Jehovah in a very particular way, was successful because of four things. First, he listened carefully to the word of God, something that was rare among the children of Israel at that time. Second, Gideon obeyed God's word and acted on it. Third, he tore down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah (6:25-28). This touched God's heart. In the degradation of Israel, God hated the idols to the uttermost. God as the genuine Husband regarded all the idols as men with whom His wife Israel had committed harlotry. Fourth, by tearing down the altar of Baal and cutting down the Asherah that belonged to his father, Gideon sacrificed his relationship with his father and his enjoyment of society. Because of what he had done, the men of the city of Ophrah contended with him and even wanted to kill him (vv. 28-30). For Gideon to do such a thing for God required that he sacrifice his own interests, and his sacrifice was a strong factor of his success.

The selection of the three hundred in 7:2-7 also stresses the sacrifice of our personal interests and enjoyment for God's

purpose. When Gideon blew the trumpet to call the people to fight against the Midianites, thirty-two thousand responded. God said that those who were with Gideon were too many for God to deliver Midian into their hand, for Israel might have vaunted himself against God, saying, "My own hand has saved me" (v. 2). By telling Gideon that he had too many people, God was indicating that He would fight for them. First, twenty-two thousand went home because they were afraid (v. 3). Then Jehovah tested the remaining ten thousand by bringing them to the water to drink. Those who bowed down on their knees and lapped as a dog laps were sent home (v. 5). Only the three hundred who lapped the water into their mouths with their hands were chosen by God for the battle against Midian (v. 6). Jehovah told Gideon that through the three hundred men who lapped in that way, He would save them from Midian. Like Gideon, these three hundred were willing to sacrifice in order to be used by God.

As a result of these four factors, Gideon received a reward: the economical Spirit came upon him (6:34). Hence, he became powerful and with only three hundred men defeated two princes and two kings (7:25; 8:10-12). With Gideon we have a picture of a man in union with God, a God-man, to fulfill God's word and to carry out God's economy.

After his great success—the greatest success in all the cycles of Israel's history recorded in Judges—Gideon had a terrible failure. The secret of his failure comprises three factors. First, Gideon was not kind. He killed those countrymen who did not support him (vv. 16-17), breaking the sixth commandment of God (Exo. 20:13). Second, he indulged in the lust of the flesh, not exercising any restriction over his fleshly lust. This is indicated by Judges 8:30, which tells us that Gideon had seventy sons, "for he had many wives." In addition, his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son (v. 31). By this Gideon broke the seventh commandment (Exo. 20:14). Third, although he did a good thing in refusing to rule over the people (Judg. 8:22-23), he coveted the spoil of his people, and they surrendered it to him (v. 24).

Gideon's indulgence in sex and his greediness for gold led to idolatry. Greediness is idolatry (Col. 3:5), and both

fornication and greediness are linked to idol worship (Eph. 5:5). Even King Solomon, who began as a God-fearing and God-loving person, eventually became an idol worshipper through his many foreign wives (1 Kings 11:4). Gideon made an ephod with the gold he had taken from the people, and this ephod became an idol to the children of Israel (Judg. 8:27). As a result, Gideon's family and the entire society of Israel were corrupted. Gideon began by tearing down the altar of Baal and its idol, but after his success he built something idolatrous. This failure canceled all his success.

Judges is a book concerning the enjoyment of the good land, which is a type of Christ. Gideon's success indicates the gaining of an excellent opportunity to enjoy Christ, but his failure indicates the losing of the opportunity to enjoy Christ. His failure shows us that we need to exercise strict control in dealing with the matters of sex and wealth. Otherwise, we will suffer the loss of the enjoyment of Christ. Any indulgence in these things will cause our enjoyment of Christ to be annulled.

Let us now go on to consider the many details of the fourth cycle of Israel's miserable history recorded in 6:1—8:32.

IV. THE FOURTH CYCLE

A. Israel Again Doing That Which Was Evil in the Sight of Jehovah

Once again the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah (6:1a).

B. Jehovah Delivering Israel into the Hand of Midian for Seven Years

Jehovah delivered Israel into the hand of Midian for seven years (vv. 1b-6a). The children of Israel made for themselves dens, caves, and strongholds in the mountains (v. 2). Whenever Israel sowed, Midian rose up with Amalek and the children of the east against Israel and came with their cattle and their tents like swarming locusts to destroy the produce of the land (vv. 3-5). Thus, "Israel was greatly impoverished because of Midian" (v. 6a).

C. The Children of Israel Crying Out to Jehovah because of Midian

The children of Israel cried out to Jehovah because of Midian (vv. 6b-7).

D. Jehovah Sending a Prophet to Reprove the Children of Israel

Jehovah sent a man who was a prophet to reprove the children of Israel (v. 8a).

1. Reminding Them of Jehovah's Delivering Them from Egypt and His Giving to Them the Land of Canaan

Through this prophet Jehovah reminded the children of Israel of His delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed them. He also reminded them that He had driven out the Canaanites before them and had given to them the land of Canaan (vv. 8b-9).

2. Charging Them Not to Fear the Gods of the Amorites

Jehovah charged the children of Israel not to fear the gods of the Amorites, but they did not listen to His voice (v. 10).

E. The Angel of Jehovah (Christ) Calling Gideon

In verses 11 through 24 we have an account of the Angel of Jehovah (Christ) calling Gideon.

1. Appearing to Him

In verses 11 through 13 we are told that the Angel of Jehovah appeared to Gideon. The Angel of Jehovah came and sat under the terebinth that was in Ophrah while Gideon was beating out the wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. In this way the Angel of Jehovah appeared to Gideon and said to him, "Jehovah is with you, valiant warrior" (v. 12).

2. Charging Him to Save Israel from the Hand of Midian

The Angel of Jehovah charged Gideon to save Israel from the hand of the Midianites (vv. 14-16). He turned to Gideon and said, "Go in this strength of yours, and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" (v. 14). When Gideon asked by what way he could save Israel, the Angel of Jehovah said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you will strike the Midianites as one man" (v. 16).

3. Performing a Sign for Him by Receiving His Offering

Gideon asked the Angel of Jehovah to perform a sign for him that it was He who was speaking with him (vv. 17-24). The Angel of Jehovah performed a sign by receiving Gideon's offering. "The Angel of Jehovah put forth the end of the staff that was in His hand and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes. And fire came up from the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. And the Angel of Jehovah went from his sight" (v. 21). This sign resulted in Gideon's building up of an altar to Jehovah, calling it Jehovah-shalom, which means "Jehovah is peace" or "Jehovah of peace" (v. 24).

F. Jehovah Charging Gideon to Tear Down the Altar of Baal That Belonged to His Father

Jehovah charged Gideon to tear down the altar of Baal that belonged to his father and to cut down the Asherah that was beside it and then to build an altar to Jehovah his God upon the top of that stronghold in the ordered manner (vv. 25-32).

1. Gideon Doing It by Ten Men at Night

Gideon did this by ten men at night and not by day because he was too afraid of his father's house and the men of the city (v. 27).

2. The Men of the City Contending for Baal

The men of the city contended for Baal (vv. 28-31). When they saw that the altar of Baal had been torn down and that the Asherah beside it had been cut down, they asked who had done this thing. After inquiring and seeking about, they concluded that Gideon had done it, and they desired to kill him.

3. Gideon Being Called Jerubbaal because of This

Because of this Gideon was called Jerubbaal, which means "Let Baal contend" (v. 32).

G. All the Midianites, Amalekites, and the Children of the East Gathering Together to Encamp in the Valley of Jezreel, and the Spirit of Jehovah Clothing Gideon

All the Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the east gathered together, and they crossed over and encamped in the valley of Jezreel (v. 33). The Spirit of Jehovah clothed Gideon, and he blew his trumpet to call the Abiezrites. Then he sent messengers to call the people of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali to come up to meet them (vv. 34-35).

H. Gideon Asking God for Signs to Water a Fleece of Wool and to Dry It

According to verses 36 through 40, Gideon asked God for signs to water a fleece of wool and to dry it. First, Gideon said that if there was dew on the fleece alone and it was dry on the ground, then he would know that Jehovah would save Israel through his hand. The next morning there was dew only on the fleece. Then Gideon asked that it be dry on the fleece only and that there be dew on all the ground. God did so that night, and it was dry on the fleece only.

I. The Three Hundred Chosen by God to Follow Gideon to Defeat Midian for Israel

In 7:2-8a we see that three hundred were chosen by God to follow Gideon to defeat Midian for Israel. Jehovah told Gideon that the people who were with him were too many

for Jehovah to deliver Midian into their hand. God charged Gideon to proclaim that whoever was afraid and trembling should return and depart. Twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained (vv. 2-3). Out of the ten thousand, only three hundred who lapped the water into their mouth with their hand were chosen by Jehovah (vv. 4-8a).

J. The Defeat of Midian

Judges 7:8b-25 describes the defeat of Midian.

1. By Gideon Hearing the Account of a Dream in the Camp of Midian

According to verses 9 through 15, Gideon heard the account of a dream in the camp of Midian. One of the Midianites recounted a dream to his companion, saying, "I have just had a dream. There was this round loaf of barley bread tumbling through the camp of Midian. And it came to the tent and struck it, so that it fell and turned upside down. And the tent collapsed" (v. 13). His companion responded by saying that this was nothing else than the sword of Gideon and that God had delivered Midian and all the camp into Gideon's hand. When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped, returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for Jehovah has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand" (v. 15).

2. By the Three Hundred Men of Gideon Divided into Three Companies Blowing the Trumpets and Shattering the Pitchers

Gideon divided the three hundred men into three companies and put trumpets into their hands, as well as empty pitchers, with torches inside the pitchers (v. 16). They blew the trumpets and shattered the pitchers. Then, holding the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands, they cried out, "A sword for Jehovah and for Gideon!" (vv. 19-20). Then the whole camp of the Midianites ran off, and they shouted and fled.

3. By Jehovah Setting Each Man's Sword against His Companion

Jehovah set each man's sword against his companion and against the whole camp (v. 22).

4. By the Men of Israel Pursuing after the Midianites

The men of Israel from Naphtali, Asher, Manasseh, and Ephraim pursued after the Midianites (vv. 23-24).

5. The Two Princes of Midian Being Slain

The children of Israel captured two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and slew them (v. 25).

K. The Complaint of Ephraim and Gideon's Pacification

The men of Ephraim contended sharply with Gideon, complaining that he did not call them when he went to battle against Midian (8:1). Gideon pacified them by asking what he had done to compare with them and saying that it was into their hand that God gave the princes of Midian. Then their hostile spirit toward him subsided (vv. 2-3).

L. The Despising and Insulting of the Men of Succoth and Penuel toward Gideon

In verses 4 through 9 and 13 through 17 we see the despising and insulting of the men of Succoth and Penuel toward Gideon and the punishment of the men of Succoth and Penuel by Gideon.

M. Gideon Further Pursuing the Midian Camps

After slaying one hundred twenty thousand men, Gideon further pursued the Midian camps of fifteen thousand men and captured and slew the two kings of Midian (vv. 10-12, 18-21).

N. Gideon's Dealing with the Men of Israel

Verses 22 through 28 speak concerning Gideon's dealing with the men of Israel.

1. Not Willing to Rule over Them

The men of Israel asked Gideon to rule over them, but he refused, saying, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. Jehovah will rule over you" (vv. 22-23).

2. Asking Them for Their Spoils of Gold and Purple Garments

Gideon asked that each of them give him an earring of gold from his spoil, and they willingly did so, giving him one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold, in addition to crescents, pendants, and purple garments (vv. 24-26).

3. Making an Ephod with Gold and Placing It in His City

Gideon made an ephod with the gold and placed it in his city, in Ophrah. All Israel went as harlots to the ephod there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his house (v. 27).

4. Midian Being Subdued by Israel, and the Land of Israel Having Rest Forty Years

Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, and the land of Israel had rest forty years in the days of Gideon (v. 28).

O. Gideon's Family and His Decease

Chapter eight concludes with a word regarding Gideon's family and his decease (vv. 29-32).

1. Gideon Having Seventy Sons by Many Wives

Gideon had seventy sons by many wives. He also had another son, by the name of Abimelech, by his concubine in Shechem (vv. 30-31).

2. Gideon Dying at a Good Age

Gideon died at a good age, and he was buried in the tomb of his father in Ophrah (v. 32).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE SIX

THE MISERABLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S FORSAKING OF GOD CHAPTERS 2—16

(4)

THE FIFTH CYCLE OF ISRAEL'S MISERABLE HISTORY

Scripture Reading: Judg. 8:33—10:5

The intrinsic significance of the fifth and sixth cycles of Israel's miserable history (8:33—10:5; 10:6—12:15) consists of Israel's forsaking God and joining herself to idols. This means that Israel divorced God, her legitimate Husband, and went after many idols.

Man's forsaking of God began in Genesis 3. God created man with a spirit so that man could contact Him, receive Him, and take Him in as life. The tree of life in the garden signified God Himself as the embodiment of life for us to contact and receive. God warned man not to partake of the other tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for eating of the fruit of that tree would issue in death. However, from the beginning of man's existence, Satan has been seducing man to take of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is the embodiment of Satan himself. To take the tree of knowledge is actually to marry Satan and divorce God.

This forsaking of God and joining to Satan is the strongest factor behind the chaos in human society. Due to man's forsaking of God and joining to Satan, the entire world, including every nation, society, and family, has become chaotic. Immediately after man forsook God and joined himself to Satan, chaos came in. The first manifestation of

this chaos was the first murder, which took place in Adam's family when Cain slew Abel. From that time onward, there has been chaos in every nation, society, and family.

Gideon's failure was due to his forsaking of God and his joining himself to Satan. In his success he was joined to God, but in his failure he joined himself to Satan. When he joined himself to Satan, the issue was murder. He also indulged in the flesh, coveted, and committed idolatry. This issued in the corruption of his family and the entire society of Israel.

Even religion is part of the universal chaos. The world spoken of in Galatians 6:14 is not the secular world but the religious world. Christ died to save us from the religious world (1:4). In man's eyes religion is good, but in God's eyes every kind of religion is a section of the satanic world. In principle, the situation in today's Christianity is the same as the universal situation of the human race—it has forsaken God and joined itself to Satan.

We have also had periods of chaos in the Lord's recovery. It seems that in the recovery there are cycles of rebellion about every ten years, involving struggles for power to fulfill ambitions. The recent rebellion among us had two roots—unforgiven offenses and unfulfilled ambitions. The intrinsic significance of all these rebellions is forsaking God to go along with Satan. Satan fell because of ambition. To go along with Satan is to enter into the ambition that was present in Satan when he fell. He wanted to ascend to the throne; he wanted to be like the Most High (Isa. 14:13-14). Hence, to forsake God and join with Satan is to enter into the intrinsic ambition within this evil one.

The result of rebellion has always been chaos, with the rebellious ones causing damage to themselves. The churches that joined the recent rebellion have become barren and have even decreased in number, while the remaining churches have increased.

In family life, whenever a husband and a wife love the Lord and reject everything other than Him, their married life will be wonderful. But once a husband or wife begins to

love something else in place of the Lord, their married life and family life become chaotic.

We have no right to divorce the Lord; we have no basis to forsake Him. We must take Him, love Him, honor Him, respect Him, regard Him, exalt Him, and cling to Him, rejecting Satan to the uttermost. Then we will be blessed.

This principle can be applied to the entire human race, to every nation, to every society, to every family, and to every individual. If we love the Lord and hate Satan, we will be blessed. However, we will only get into trouble whenever we change and begin to love something other than Christ. Psalm 33:12 says, "Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah." Blessed is everyone—nation, society, group, and individual—whose Lord, Head, King, and Husband is Jehovah.

At this point, let us turn to Judges 8:33—10:5, which covers yet another cycle of Israel's miserable history.

I. THE FIFTH CYCLE

A. Israel Turning Again and Going as Harlots after the Baalim

As soon as Gideon died, Israel turned again and went as harlots after the Baalim, making Baal-berith their god. They did not remember Jehovah their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies all around, nor did they show mercy to the house of Gideon for all the good he had done to Israel (8:33-35).

B. Abimelech, the Son of Jerubbaal, Gideon, Slaying His Brothers

Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal, Gideon, slew his brothers, the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone (9:1-5). He was supported by his mother's brothers, all the family of his mother's father, and all the men of Shechem (vv. 1-3). They supported Abimelech with seventy pieces of silver from the temple of the idol Baal-berith, with which he hired worthless and wanton men to follow him (v. 4). However, the youngest son of Jerubbaal, Jotham, was left, for he hid himself (v. 5).

C. The Men of Shechem and All the House of Millo Making Abimelech King at Shechem

The men of Shechem and all the house of Millo made Abimelech king at Shechem (v. 6).

D. Jotham Protesting against Abimelech

Jotham protested against Abimelech (vv. 7-21). He likened Abimelech not to a good olive tree or a good fig tree or a good vine but, derisively, to an evil bramble (vv. 7-15). Then he cursed the men of Shechem, the house of Millo, and Abimelech with God's punishment over them (vv. 16-20). After Jotham did this, he ran off and fled (v. 21).

E. Abimelech Ruling over Israel Three Years

Abimelech ruled over Israel three years (v. 22).

F. God Sending an Evil Spirit between Abimelech and the Men of Shechem for the Punishment over Abimelech and the Men of Shechem

God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and they dealt treacherously with him, so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be avenged and so that their blood might be upon Abimelech their brother and upon the men of Shechem, who strengthened him to slay his brothers (vv. 23-24).

G. The Men of Shechem Dealing Treacherously with Abimelech

The men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, revolting against him and being strengthened by Gaal the son of Ebed (vv. 25-29).

H. Zebul the Ruler of the City Helping Abimelech to Defeat Gaal and the Men of Shechem

Zebul the ruler of the city helped Abimelech to defeat Gaal and the men of Shechem, tear down the city of Shechem,

and set its stronghold on fire to burn about a thousand men and women who escaped there (vv. 30-49).

I. God Repaying the Evil of Abimelech and All the Evil of the Men of Shechem

Abimelech went to take Thebez. When he came up to the tower and fought against it, a certain woman threw a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and it cracked his skull. He immediately called to the young man who bore his armor and told him to draw his sword and kill him, lest people say that he was slain by a woman. The young man pierced him through, and he died. Thus, God repaid the evil of Abimelech and all the evil of the men of Shechem, and the curse of Jotham came upon them (vv. 50-57).

After considering chapter nine of Judges, we can see that it presents to us a picture of what a mess God's elect Israel had become and to what extent they had degraded. Their degradation was initiated in their forsaking of Jehovah their God and their worshipping of the idols of the Canaanites, which issued in their indulgence in fleshly lust by having many wives to produce many sons. Gideon produced seventy-two sons of many wives (8:30-31; 9:5); another judge produced thirty sons (10:4); another judge produced thirty sons and thirty daughters (12:8-9); and another judge produced forty sons and thirty grandsons (vv. 13-14). Israel's degradation also issued in the wantonness of their hatred in slaying one another, ending themselves in full destruction.

J. Tola Rising Up to Save Israel

After Abimelech, Tola, a man of Issachar, rose up to save Israel, and he judged Israel twenty-three years. After Tola, Jair the Gileadite, who had thirty sons, rose up and judged Israel twenty-two years (10:1-5).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE MISERABLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S FORSAKING OF GOD CHAPTERS 2—16

(5)

THE SIXTH CYCLE OF ISRAEL'S MISERABLE HISTORY

Scripture Reading: Judg. 10:6—12:15

I have the burden to speak further concerning forsaking God and being joined to Satan. This matter is fully revealed and recorded in the Scriptures. The first man was poisoned by this, and the first family was devastated by this. Ever since the time of Genesis 3, man has been forsaking God and joining to Satan, taking many things as replacements of God. In his fourteen Epistles, Paul ministered the all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ, but he also dealt with all kinds of replacements of Christ.

The book of Judges shows us how degraded and corrupt Israel had become. It is hard to imagine that the children of Israel, who had been chosen, taught, trained, and disciplined by God and who had God's law, could have become so rotten. Their degradation began with their forsaking of God and their worshipping of idols, and it issued in their indulgence in fleshly lust and in wanton self-destruction. Samson, the last judge mentioned in this book, was very powerful, yet the factor of his failure was his indulgence in sex. At the end of Judges, there is an account of wanton slaughter, describing how the entire tribe of Benjamin was nearly extinguished by Israel. The factor that led to this degradation was that they forsook God to the uttermost and turned to idols. Here we see that idol worship is closely linked to fornication and

murder. If someone becomes an idol worshipper, he will become a person who is very indulgent in sex and full of hatred toward others.

I have been serving the Lord for nearly sixty-one years and have had much consideration concerning these matters. My realization is that all the sins, all the evils, all the iniquities, come out of one source—forsaking God and joining to something which becomes a replacement of God. This is true even in small things. For example, a sister's combing of her hair can be an idol. If a sister pays too much attention to her hair, honoring it excessively, that kind of honor is a worship. Such a sister may not have time in the morning to spend ten minutes with the Lord, but she has plenty of time to comb her hair. The sisters may need to check with the Lord regarding this, saying, "Lord, is the way I care for my hair a replacement of You?" If a sister checks with the Lord in this way, the Lord will tell her, her conscience will tell her, and her intuition in her spirit will also tell her.

In recent years, certain ones left us and formed divisions. It seems that the leaders among them are doing nothing but traveling from place to place in order to create and strengthen such divisions. Division has become a thing that motivates and energizes them. The goal of their activity is to separate the saints from the enjoyment of the New Testament ministry. Their intention is to poison the saints in order to deaden them, cool them down, and cause them to have doubts about the Lord's recovery. The main factor with these ones is that they have left the church and joined themselves to the "demon" of division.

I have published a book called *The Fermentation of the Present Rebellion*, presenting the whole story, fully documented. That book concludes by saying that we need to "reject any kind of division (1 Cor. 1:10), to stand against any wind of teaching and any spreading of spiritual death (Eph. 4:14; 2 Tim. 2:16-17), and to separate ourselves from the contagious ones—exercising to quarantine" (Titus 3:10; Rom. 16:17). Some, however, have not agreed to quarantine these ones and have embraced division. They have been deceived to such an extent that they take the matter of division as an idol.

In our spiritual life, even to take a small thing, such as combing our hair or buying something, may be to take another husband. To some extent, this is to forsake Christ. Even in holding a thought preferring this or that thing, our preference can become an idol. You may say that you are still with the Lord, but you may be with the Lord in a general way, but particularly, in a certain thing, you may not be with the Lord.

God's Spirit is indwelling us and is speaking to us all the time. Sometimes I would like to speak something to my wife, even something spiritual, but someone within is saying, "Don't talk." To take my preference to speak that thing would be to make that thing an idol and would bring me into chaos. But to obey the inner speaking is to hold to our one Lord, one Master, one Head, one Husband.

Let us now turn to Judges 10:6—12:15 and consider the sixth cycle of Israel's miserable history.

VI. THE SIXTH CYCLE

A. Israel Again Doing That Which Was Evil in the Sight of Jehovah

Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah. They served the Baalim, the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines, forsaking Jehovah and not serving Him (10:6).

B. The Anger of Jehovah Burning against Israel

The anger of Jehovah burned against Israel, and Jehovah sold them into the hand of the Philistines and of the Amorites, who oppressed them eighteen years. The children of Israel were greatly distressed (vv. 7-9).

C. Israel Crying Out to Jehovah

The children of Israel cried out to Jehovah, saying, "We have sinned against You, for we have forsaken our God and have served the Baalim" (v. 10). Then they prayed for deliverance and returned to Jehovah (vv. 15-16a).

D. Jehovah's Rebuking of Israel

In verses 11 through 14 we have Jehovah's rebuking of Israel. First, He asked them if He had not saved them from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the children of Ammon, and the Philistines. He also reminded them that He saved them when they were oppressed by the Sidonians, Amalek, and Maon. Then He went on to say, "But you forsook Me and served other gods; therefore I will not save you again. Go and cry out to the gods that you have chosen. Let them save you in the time of your distress" (vv. 13-14).

E. Jehovah Being Unable to Bear Israel's Misery

In verse 16b we are told that Jehovah was no longer able to bear Israel's misery.

F. The Pressure of the Ammonites and the Need of a Head over Israel to Take the Lead to Fight against the Ammonites

Verses 17 and 18 speak of the pressure of the Ammonites and the need of a head over Israel to take the lead to fight against the Ammonites. The princes of Gilead said each to his companion, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (v. 18).

G. The Rising Up of Jephthah

Judges 11:1-11 records the rising up of Jephthah, a mighty man of Gilead, the son of a harlot. He was rejected by his stepbrothers but was received by the worthless men (vv. 2-3). Eventually, he was requested by the elders of Gilead to be their head and chief to fight the Ammonites for them (vv. 4-11).

H. Jephthah's Negotiation with the King of the Ammonites

Jephthah negotiated with the king of the Ammonites. His negotiation was based upon the fact that during a history of three hundred years, there had been no reason for the

Ammonites to fight against Israel (vv. 12-27). However, the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah (v. 28).

I. Jehovah's Spirit Coming upon Jephthah, and Jehovah Delivering the Ammonites into His Hand

The Spirit of Jehovah came upon Jephthah, and Jehovah delivered the Ammonites into His hand (vv. 29-32).

J. Jephthah Defeating the Ammonites

Jephthah defeated the Ammonites and took their twenty cities. Thus the Ammonites were subdued before the children of Israel (v. 33).

K. Jephthah Making a Vow to Jehovah

In verses 30 and 31 Jephthah made a vow to Jehovah. According to verses 34 through 40, Jephthah's daughter kept this vow with her whole life's virginity.

L. The Ephraimites Quarreling with Jephthah, and Jephthah Fighting against Them

In 12:1-6 we see that the Ephraimites quarreled with Jephthah and that he fought against them.

M. Jephthah Judging Israel Six Years

Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then he died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead. After him, Ibzan, who had thirty sons and thirty daughters, judged Israel seven years (vv. 7-9). Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem, and then Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel ten years. He was followed by Abdon the Pirathonite, who had forty sons and thirty grandsons, judging Israel eight years. In total, these judges judged Israel thirty-one years (vv. 10-15).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE MISERABLE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S FORSAKING OF GOD CHAPTERS 2—16

(6)

THE SEVENTH CYCLE OF ISRAEL'S MISERABLE HISTORY

Scripture Reading: Judg. 13:1—16:31

The book of Judges records seven cycles of Israel's miserable history of forsaking God. In reading through these cycles in Judges, it is difficult to understand how someone as positive as Gideon could become so negative. Between his success and his failure, it must have been that a demon entered him, because he forsook God and joined himself to Satan.

This principle can be seen even more in the case of Samson. His birth was a miracle initiated by the appearing of the Angel of Jehovah. When Samson was in the bosom of his mother, he was sanctified to be a Nazarite. As he grew up, he was clean and pure according to God's ordination, and he was empowered by the Spirit of God. When the Israelites were under the tyranny of the Philistines, the Spirit of God as the holy, economical Spirit came upon Samson, and he became powerful.

However, Samson's unique problem was in the matter of sex. He was not genuine in seeking for a spouse; rather, his contacting of women was just to indulge his lusts. He indulged his lust with a Philistine woman, with a harlot in Gaza, and with a woman named Delilah. Although he had been empowered by God, he was damaged and destroyed to the uttermost because of his indulgence in lust.

Shortly after I decided to give up my job and serve the Lord, I went to Shanghai to see Brother Nee. He told me that in serving the Lord the brothers must learn the principle of not contacting a female, especially a young one, in private. I was deeply impressed by this, and from that time I have practiced Brother Nee's instructions and have also passed them on to the saints.

The sisters should clothe and cover their body in a proper way. First Timothy 2:9 charges the sisters to "adorn themselves in proper clothing with modesty and sobriety, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly clothing." The word *proper* denotes fitting to the sisters' nature and position as saints of God. In Greek the word for *clothing* implies deportment, demeanor. A sister's demeanor, of which clothing is the main sign, must befit her saintly position. The word *modesty* means, literally, "shamefastness," denoting being bound or made fast by an honorable shame (Vincent), implying not forward or overbold but moderate, observing the proprieties of womanhood. The word *sobriety* means "sobermindedness, self-restraint; the restricting of oneself soberly and discreetly." The sisters in a local church should clothe themselves with these two virtues—shamefastness and self-restraint—as their demeanor.

Hebrews 13:4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all," because through marriage mankind continues to exist on earth and is propagated to replenish the earth. God created a need and desire within man to be married. A desire to be married is not sinful; on the contrary, it is according to God's ordination. However, the time to consider marriage is after graduation from college. All the brothers and sisters should consecrate to the Lord, giving themselves to Him and promising that they will live for Him and even live Him their entire life. Then they should pray to see if there is the leading of the Lord in this matter, rather than trying to be too selective. Keeping these items will be a great protection to the young people.

At this juncture, let us consider the details concerning Samson recorded in Judges 13:1—16:31.

VII. THE SEVENTH CYCLE

A. Israel Again Doing That Which Was Evil in the Sight of Jehovah

The children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah (13:1a).

B. Jehovah Delivering Israel into the Hand of the Philistines Forty Years

Jehovah delivered the children of Israel into the hand of the Philistines forty years (v. 1b).

C. The Performance of Samson

1. His Origin

In verses 3 through 23 we have an account of Samson's origin.

a. His Father Manoah Being of the Family of the Danites, and His Mother Being Barren

Samson's father, Manoah, was of the family of the Danites. His wife was barren and had borne no children (v. 2).

b. His Conception

1) A Miracle Initiated by the Appearing of the Angel of Jehovah (Christ)

Samson's conception was actually a miracle initiated by the appearing of the Angel of Jehovah (Christ) to his mother and father. Verse 3 says, "The Angel of Jehovah appeared to the woman and said to her, Now you are barren and have borne no children; but you will conceive and bear a son." When she told her husband about this, he entreated Jehovah, saying, "Oh, Lord! Let the man of God, whom You sent, come again to us, I pray; and let Him teach us what we should do with the child that is to be born" (v. 8). God hearkened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of God came again to the woman. She went to tell her husband, and he followed her. When Manoah asked the Angel of Jehovah what His

name was, He said, "Why do you ask about My name, since it is wonderful?" (v. 18).

2) To Be a Nazarite Boy

Samson was to be a Nazarite boy, who was not to drink wine, nor to eat anything unclean, nor to cut his hair with a razor, so that he would save Israel from the hand of the Philistines (vv. 3-5, 7).

2. His Birth and Growth

a. Born to Be Called Samson

Verse 24a says that the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. The name *Samson* means "sunlike."

b. Growing as a Nazarite by the Blessing of Jehovah

Samson grew as a Nazarite by the blessing of Jehovah (v. 24b).

1) With the Head Covered

Samson grew up with his head covered. This was signified by his not cutting his hair (v. 5).

2) In the Submission to God

Samson was in submission to God. This was signified by the keeping of his long hair (cf. 1 Cor. 11:15).

3) Without Touching Worldly Pleasures

As a Nazarite, Samson grew up without touching worldly pleasures. This was signified by his not drinking wine (Judg. 13:7a).

4) In Keeping Himself Clean

Samson also kept himself clean. This was signified by his not eating the unclean things (v. 7b).

3. Moved by the Spirit of God

Samson was moved by the Spirit of God (v. 25).

4. His Faith in God

Samson had faith in God (cf. Heb. 11:32). His faith is seen in his tearing a young lion by the Spirit of Jehovah rushing upon him (14:5-6), in his slaying thirty men by the Spirit of Jehovah rushing upon him (v. 19), and in his destroying the house where he was compelled to perform (16:28-30).

5. His Might

Chapters fourteen through sixteen describe a number of instances of Samson's might. We see his might in his tearing a young lion by the Spirit of Jehovah and in his killing thirty men by the Spirit rushing upon him (14:5-6, 19). We see his might in his catching three hundred foxes (15:4). According to verses 12 through 16, Samson's might was displayed in his breaking the two ropes with which he was bound and in his killing one thousand men by the Spirit of Jehovah rushing upon him. Moreover, Samson's might was shown in his plucking up the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts with the bar and bringing them up to the top of the mountain in front of Hebron (16:3). The last case of Samson's might was in his destroying the house where he performed (vv. 29-30).

6. His Failure

Samson failed in not contacting God and in indulging in sex. He indulged in sex with a woman of the Philistines, whom he married and who released his secret to the Philistines (14:1-3, 10-17); with a harlot in Gaza, in whose place Samson was surrounded by the Philistines (16:1-3); and with a woman by the name of Delilah, who released the secret of his great strength (vv. 4-20a).

7. His Miserable Ending

Judges 16:20b-30 is a record of Samson's miserable ending. First, Jehovah left him (v. 20b). Then the Philistines grabbed him, gouged out his eyes, and bound him with fetters, and he ground at the mill in the prison house (v. 21). He was forced to perform before the Philistines that they might celebrate their victory over him before their god Dagon

(vv. 23-25). Finally, Samson was killed by the house which was destroyed by him (vv. 28-30).

8. Samson Judging Israel Twenty Years

The record in Judges regarding Samson concludes with the word saying that he had judged Israel twenty years (v. 31b).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE NINE

THE STINKING STORY OF ISRAEL'S CORRUPTION BEFORE GOD CHAPTERS 17—21

(1)

THE ABOMINABLE CHAOS IN THEIR WORSHIP

Scripture Reading: Judg. 17—18

In this life-study of the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, we are concerned not with history but with learning from the types how to gain Christ and enjoy Him. The history contained in these books is a great type that shows how God's elect can gain and enjoy the good land, which is a complete and all-inclusive type of Christ. Even the small details show us the secret of gaining and enjoying Christ, just as in our daily life something as small as shopping for an article of clothing can be a factor in whether or not we obtain Christ and enjoy Christ.

When we were saved, we were brought into a fellowship of the Divine Trinity with His redeemed and regenerated people. From that time God and we have been in a fellowship. First John 1:3 says, "That which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." This fellowship is between the apostles and God and between the believers and the apostles. The full salvation of God is in this fellowship. It is in this fellowship that we can gain what God has given us, that is, the Son of God given to us by God as our allotted portion.

If we remain in this fellowship, we will have the way to gain and enjoy Christ. If our fellowship with God is cut off, we will lose our enjoyment immediately. Concerning this, the

Lord Jesus uses the word *abide* and speaks of our abiding in Him as the vine (John 15:4). The vine is a figure of the all-inclusive Christ under God's cultivation. As long as the branch abides in the vine, there is fellowship. But once a branch ceases to abide in the vine, the branch is cut off, becomes barren and dry, and loses the enjoyment of the riches of the vine (vv. 5-6).

The fellowship of life is not a rough matter but is very fine. Even a little word spoken with an improper attitude is enough to cut us off from the fellowship of life.

Our enjoyment of Christ is essential. Our fellowship can speed up the turning of the great wheel of God's move in the universe. But if we are cut off from the fellowship just a little, God's economy will not be able to go forward for a period of time. Therefore, we need to be careful every day and in every detail, keeping ourselves in the enjoyment of Christ all the time. Then God's economy will be able to go forward.

In Revelation 22:20 the Lord Jesus said, "I come quickly," but today there is no sign that He is coming, because the wheel has not had an adequate opportunity to turn. If the saints in the Lord's recovery take care of all the items of the intrinsic significances of the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, the Lord will be able to come back much sooner. However, doing things without taking care of the inner feeling, the sense of life within, may delay the Lord for a long time.

The rebellion that took place in 1959-1965 in Taiwan delayed the Lord very much. When we began the ministry there in 1949, we increased nearly a hundred-fold in just a few years. Since the rebellion the rate of increase has never been the same. The recent rebellion in the recovery has also delayed the Lord and, in certain respects, hindered the move of the wheel of God's economy. For this reason, I have been stressing the intrinsic significances in Joshua and Judges. I have been doing this not only to show that God has given us Christ as the good land but also to show how we can possess and enjoy this land for generations to come.

Being saved is easy, but remaining in the fellowship with God to enjoy Christ is not easy. Many fundamental Christians

preach that Christ, the Son of God, is the Savior of sinners, but they may know very little, if anything, about the fellowship with the Triune God.

At this juncture, let us consider the situation of Israel as it is presented in Judges 17 and 18. In their degradation Israel became chaotic in three ways: in government, in worship, and in morality. They had no government, no administration. God's tabernacle was at Shiloh, and the high priest had the Urim and Thummim, but there was no administration. Judges 17 and 18 reveal the abominable chaos in the children of Israel's worship. Micah set up a house of gods in his home. His mother consecrated silver to Jehovah to make an idol and a molten image. Micah then set up a house of gods, made an ephod and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons to be his priest. The ephod signifies the authority of God, without which no one can worship God. Later, Micah consecrated a Levite to be his house priest, paying him a salary of ten pieces of silver a year plus an array of clothing and his food. In those days the Danites robbed Micah of his idol, the ephod, the teraphim, and the molten image with his priest, and with them they set up another worship place in the city of Dan, while God's tabernacle remained in Shiloh. The result was two worship centers—the proper one with God's tabernacle at Shiloh and the improper one in Dan. That was the chaos of the children of Israel in their worship.

We may apply this picture to the present situation of Christianity. Today's Christianity has many "houses of Micah," the most prominent of which is the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church has set up idols, made its own "ephod," and set up its own priests. According to the New Testament all those who are born of God should be priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), but Catholicism has hired its own priests and set up a hierarchy under a pope. In principle, Catholicism is the same as the house of Micah in Judges. The state churches, the denominations, and many of the independent groups are also houses of Micah, full of idols as replacements of Christ.

Not everything in Christianity is wrong, but everything

is a mixture. It is like the woman who hid leaven in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened (Matt. 13:33). The meal signifies Christ as food for God and for His people. The leaven signifies evil things (1 Cor. 5:6, 8) and evil doctrines (Matt. 16:6, 11-12). Micah's mother offered something to God, but her offering to God was mixed with the leaven of idolatry. Today the same mixture and chaotic situation exists in Christianity.

Let us now turn to Judges 17 and 18 and consider what these chapters have to say regarding the abominable chaos in Israel's worship.

I. MICAH SETTING UP A HOUSE OF GODS IN HIS HOME

Judges 17:1-6 tells us that Micah, a man from the hill country of Ephraim, set up a house of gods in his house.

A. Taking Eleven Hundred Pieces of Silver from His Mother

Micah took eleven hundred pieces of silver from his mother without her knowing it (v. 2a).

B. Micah's Mother Uttering a Curse

Micah's mother uttered a curse and spoke it in his hearing (v. 2b).

C. Micah Confessing That He Stole the Silver

Micah confessed to his mother that he stole the silver, and she said, "Blessed of Jehovah be my son!" (v. 2c).

D. Micah Returning the Silver to His Mother

Micah returned the silver to his mother, and she consecrated the silver to Jehovah from her hand to her son to make an idol and a molten image. She gave two hundred pieces of the silver to the founder, who made them into an idol and a molten image (vv. 3-4).

E. Micah Setting Up a House of Gods and Making an Ephod and Teraphim and Consecrating One of His Sons to Become His Priest

Micah set up a house of gods. He also made an ephod and teraphim and consecrated one of his sons to become his priest (v. 5).

F. There Being No King in Israel, and Everyone Doing That Which Was Right in His Own Eyes

Verse 6 says that in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

II. MICAH CONSECRATING A LEVITE TO BE HIS HOUSE PRIEST

In verses 7 through 13 we see that Micah consecrated a Levite to be his house priest.

A. The Levite Being a Young Man from Bethlehem in Judah

The Levite was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah. He was a sojourner, traveling in order to dwell wherever he could find a place (vv. 7-9).

B. Micah Asking This Young Man to Stay with Him

Micah asked this young man to stay with him and be a father and a priest to him, promising to pay him ten pieces of silver a year and an array of clothing and his food (v. 10).

C. The Levite Being Content to Stay with Micah Like One of His Sons

The Levite was content to stay with Micah, and the young man was to Micah like one of his sons (v. 11).

D. Micah Consecrating the Levite to Be His Priest in His House

Micah consecrated the Levite to be his priest in his house.

Then Micah said, "Now I know that Jehovah will prosper me, because the Levite has become my priest" (vv. 12-13).

III. THE DANITES ROBBING MICAH OF HIS SCULPTURED IDOL, THE EPHOD, THE TERAPHIM, AND THE MOLTEN IMAGE WITH HIS PRIEST

In chapter eighteen we see that the Danites robbed Micah of his sculptured idol, the ephod, the teraphim, and the molten image with his priest.

A. The Tribe of the Danites Seeking for Themselves an Inheritance to Dwell In

In those days there was no king in Israel, and the tribe of the Danites sought for themselves an inheritance to dwell in, for unto that day the lot had not fallen for them on an inheritance among the tribes of Israel (v. 1).

B. The Children of Dan Sending Five Men to Spy Out the Land and Search It Out

The children of Dan sent five men from among all of them, men of valor, to spy out the land and search it out. They came to the country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and they lodged there (v. 2).

C. The Five Men Asking the Levite to Inquire of God That They Might Know If Their Way Would Be Prosperous

The five men recognized the voice of the young Levite man, and they asked him, "Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this place? And what do you have here?" (v. 3). When the Levite explained that Micah had hired him to be his priest, they said to him, "Inquire now of God that we may know if our way on which we are going will be prosperous" (vv. 4-5).

D. The Priest Ordained by Micah Telling the Five Men to Go in Peace

The priest ordained by Micah said to the five men, "Go

in peace; your way on which you are going is before Jehovah" (v. 6).

E. The Five Men Coming to Laish and Seeing the Life of the People

The five men left and came to Laish. They saw the people who were in it, dwelling quiet and secure. Then they went back to their brothers and asked them to go to take possession of the land, saying, "God has indeed delivered it into your hand" (vv. 7-10).

F. Six Hundred Men Setting Out from the Family of Dan and Coming to the House of Micah

Six hundred men girded with weapons of war set out from the family of Dan and came to the house of Micah in the hill country of Ephraim (vv. 11-13).

G. The Five Men Who Had Gone to Spy the Land of Laish Speaking to the Levite concerning His Being a Priest for a Tribe and Family in Israel

The five men who had gone to spy the land of Laish entered into the house of the young Levite, the house of Micah, with six hundred men girded with weapons of war standing at the entrance of the gate, to seize the sculptured idol, the ephod, the teraphim, and the molten image. When the priest asked them what they were doing, they said to him, "Is it better for you to be a priest for the house of one man or a priest for a tribe and family in Israel?" (vv. 14-19).

H. The Young Priest Taking the Ephod, the Teraphim, and the Sculptured Idol and Going into the Midst of the People

The young priest's heart was glad. He took the ephod, the teraphim, and the sculptured idol and went into the midst of the people. Thus, the Danites robbed Micah of all the idols and the priest with which he worshipped God (vv. 20-26).

I. The Danites Coming to Laish and Slaying the People

Taking the idols which Micah had made and the priest that had been his, the Danites came to Laish, slew the people, burned the city, and called the name of the city Dan, according to the name of Dan their father (vv. 27-29).

J. The Children of Dan Erecting the Sculptured Idol

The children of Dan erected the sculptured idol. Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, he and his sons, became priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. They set up the sculptured idol that Micah had made the whole time that the house of God was in Shiloh (vv. 30-31).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDGES

MESSAGE TEN

THE STINKING STORY OF ISRAEL'S CORRUPTION BEFORE GOD CHAPTERS 17—21

(2)

THE SODOMITICAL CORRUPTION IN THEIR MORALITY AND THE TERRIBLE SLAUGHTER AMONG THEIR TRIBES

Scripture Reading: Judg. 19—21

Before we consider chapters nineteen through twenty-one, I would like to give a further word concerning the application of the account of Micah's house of idols (17:1-13) to the situation in Christianity today.

Any teaching or practice among Christians that is not according to the Scriptures is an idol. In the recent rebellion among us, a teaching regarding autonomy was promoted. Those who teach this stress that every local church is absolutely autonomous. However, this is contrary to the Scriptures and produces local sects. This teaching has become an idol.

In the United States every state is autonomous in business affairs, but the fifty states are not fifty different nations. On the contrary, there are fifty states but one nation. Likewise, each local church is autonomous in its business affairs, but the teaching that each local church is absolutely autonomous in every way within its locality is an idol. Nevertheless, some are using this teaching to spread division.

Every item in the Lord's recovery must be according to the Bible. For example, calling on the name of the Lord and pray-reading are scriptural practices (Gen. 4:26; 13:4; Eph.

6:17-18). When we call on the name of the Lord, our inner man is refreshed. When we pray-read the Word, we are fed.

The difference between the churches in the Lord's recovery and Christianity is that the local churches in the recovery try their best to do everything according to the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible reveals that the church as the Body of Christ is universally and uniquely one. Because all the members of the Body of Christ exist on earth in different cities, this unique Body of Christ is expressed among people on earth in many cities—one city, one church. Whereas Catholicism, the denominations, and the independent groups are "houses of Micah," we meet as a local church, as the church in a particular city. In the Scriptures there are no house churches, street churches, state churches, or district churches. Instead, there are local churches. The local church in a city is a part of the Body. Therefore, we practice the local churches, and we also practice the universal Body of Christ.

The intrinsic significance of the books of Joshua and Judges is that these books show us the detailed points of how to possess Christ, keep Christ, and enjoy Christ. We have seen that, according to the record in Judges, in the degradation Israel became chaotic in government, in worship, and in morality. Such a people surely could not gain Christ and enjoy Him. But we thank the Lord that, in the midst of the chaotic situation, there was a person—Boaz—who had the highest standard of morality. As we will see when we come to the book of Ruth, according to typology Boaz was one who enjoyed Christ very much.

Let us now look into what is recorded concerning Israel in the last three chapters of Judges.

I. THE SODOMITICAL CORRUPTION IN THEIR MORALITY

Chapter nineteen is a record of Israel's sodomitical corruption in their morality.

A. The Story of Corruption

Judges 19:1-26 tells a story of corruption. In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite dwelling

in the far end of the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah (v. 1). The concubine went about as a harlot and departed from the Levite to her father's house, to Bethlehem in Judah, for four months (v. 2). Her husband rose up and came after her to speak to her affectionately and to bring her back (vv. 3-9). He brought her from her father's house, went through Jerusalem, and came to Gibeah, which belonged to Benjamin. He sat in the square of the city, but no one took them into his house to lodge them (vv. 10-15). In the evening an old man out of the field from his work saw the wayfarer in the square of the city and brought him and his concubine to his house and took them as his guests (vv. 16-21).

While they were making their hearts merry, the worthless men of the city surrounded the house, beating on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, saying, "Bring out the man who went into your house that we may know him" (v. 22). The old man, the master of the house, came out and said to them, "No, my brothers; do not do this evil thing, I beg you. Since this man has come into my house, do not commit this folly. Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out, I beg you; and humble them and do to them what seems good in your sight. But to this man do not do such folly" (vv. 23-24). But the worthless men did not want to listen to the old man; so the Levite took hold of his concubine and brought her out to them; and they knew her. They abused her all night long until morning (v. 25). In the early morning the concubine came and fell at the entrance of the old man's house, where her lord had been until it was light (v. 26).

B. The Spreading of This Story of Corruption throughout All the Territory of Israel

According to verses 27 through 30 the story of this corruption was spread throughout all the territory of Israel. The Levite rose up in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way. He discovered his concubine fallen at the entrance of the house with her hands upon the threshold (v. 27). He spoke to her, but there was no

answer. He then put her upon the donkey and went to his place (v. 28). When he came to his house, he cut her up limb by limb into twelve pieces and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel (v. 29). When everyone saw this, they said, "No such thing has ever happened or been seen since the day the children of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, and take counsel and speak" (v. 30).

II. THE TERRIBLE SLAUGHTER AMONG THEIR TRIBES

In chapters twenty and twenty-one we have an account of the terrible slaughter among their tribes.

A. All the Children of Israel Gathering as One Man unto Jehovah

All the children of Israel from Dan as far as Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, gathered as one man unto Jehovah. The leaders of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the congregation of the people of God at Mizpah, four hundred thousand footmen who drew the sword. The children of Benjamin heard about it (20:1-3a).

B. The Levite Telling Them the Story of the Wickedness and Folly of the Men of Gibeah

The Levite, the husband of the woman who had been murdered, told them the story of the wickedness and folly of the men of Gibeah. Then he asked all the children of Israel to give their advice and counsel (vv. 3b-7).

C. All the People Rising Up as One Man and, Knit Together as One Man, Being Gathered against the City of Gibeah

All the people rose up as one man, saying that none of them would go to their tents nor any of them return to their houses. Rather, they would go up against Gibeah by lot. Thus all the men of Israel, knit together as one man, were gathered against the city (vv. 8-11).

D. The Tribes of Israel Sending Men throughout the Tribe of Benjamin

The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, requesting them to deliver up the worthless men who were in Gibeah, for they would kill them and put away the evil from Israel (vv. 12-13a).

E. The Benjaminites Not Listening to the Voice of Their Brothers, the Children of Israel

The Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the children of Israel. The children of Benjamin gathered together at Gibeah from their cities to go to battle with the children of Israel, with twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, apart from seven hundred choice men from Gibeah. These went out against four hundred thousand men of Israel who drew the sword, men of war (vv. 13b-17).

F. The Children of Israel Going Up to Bethel and Inquiring of God

The children of Israel went up to Bethel and inquired of God as to which of them should go up first into battle with the children of Benjamin, and Jehovah said, "Judah first" (v. 18).

G. The Children of Israel and the Children of Benjamin Coming into the Battle

The children of Israel and the children of Benjamin came into the battle, and on that day the children of Benjamin slew twenty-two thousand men of Israel (vv. 19-21).

H. The Children of Israel Going Up and Weeping before Jehovah, Inquiring of Him

The children of Israel went up and wept before Jehovah into the evening. They inquired of Jehovah, saying, "Shall I again approach the battle with the children of Benjamin my brother?" Jehovah said, "Go up against him" (vv. 22-23).

I. On the Second Day the Children of Israel Going to Fight with the Children of Benjamin

On the second day the children of Israel went to fight with the children of Benjamin, who slew another eighteen thousand men among the children of Israel (vv. 24-25).

J. All the Children of Israel Going Up to Bethel and Weeping before Jehovah

All the children of Israel went up to Bethel and wept before Jehovah, fasting until the evening and offering burnt offerings and peace offerings before Jehovah. They inquired of Jehovah, saying, "Shall I again go out into battle with the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?" Jehovah answered, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand" (vv. 26-28).

K. The Children of Israel Going Up against the Children of Benjamin on the Third Day

The children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibeah as at other times. First, the children of Benjamin slew about thirty men of Israel. Then the children of Israel destroyed twenty-five thousand one hundred men of Benjamin, by Jehovah striking them down before Israel (vv. 29-35).

L. The Ambush of Israel Hurrying and Rushing against Gibeah and Slaying the Whole City

The ambush of Israel hurried and rushed against Gibeah and slew the whole city (even though about thirty men were slain by the children of Benjamin) and burned the city. Then the children of Benjamin turned before the men of Israel toward the wilderness, but the children of Israel overtook them and killed twenty-five thousand of them on that day (vv. 36-46).

M. Six Hundred Men of the Children of Benjamin Turning and Fleeing into the Wilderness

Six hundred men of the children of Benjamin turned and fled into the wilderness. The men of Israel returned to the children of Benjamin, striking them, both the entire city with the cattle and all that was found there. Moreover, all the cities that were found they set on fire (vv. 47-48).

N. The Children of Israel Being Grieved concerning Benjamin Their Brother

The children of Israel were grieved concerning Benjamin their brother that one tribe had been cut down from Israel (21:1-6, 15).

O. The Children of Israel Planning to Get Wives and Possessions for the Remnant of Benjamin

In verses 7 through 24 we see that the children of Israel planned to get wives and possessions for the remnant of Benjamin. They sent twelve thousand of the valiant to destroy the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead. These captured four hundred young virgins to be wives of the Benjaminites (vv. 7-14). In addition to this, the elders of the assembly commanded the Benjaminites to catch the daughters of Shiloh to be their wives, and the children of Benjamin did so (vv. 16-23a). Then the Benjaminites went and dwelt in their inheritance and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them (v. 23b).

P. In Those Days There Being No King in Israel, and Each Man Doing What Was Right in His Own Eyes

The book of Judges concludes by saying that in those days there was no king in Israel; each man did what was right in his own eyes (v. 25).