

# JUDGES

## JUDGES — INTRODUCTION

The story of Judges is something like this: While Joshua and the elders of his generation lived — those who had personally known the wonders of Jehovah — the people continued in measurable obedience to the divine law. But when these died and another generation came on the scene there began a decline.

The way had been made easy for this by their failure through unbelief to drive out all the Canaanites from amongst them, as related in Joshua.

The proximity of these heathen acted like leaven in the dough. Israel intermarried with them contrary to the divine decree, and was led into idolatry thereby. This weakened their power so that from conquerors they were changed into the conquered, turning their back upon God, He, in a sense, turned His back upon them, and allowed them to be taken captive and sorely oppressed.

In their distress they would repent and cry for mercy, when He would deliver them through a leader miraculously endued, and called a judge. As long as this judge lived they would be held in obedience again, but on his decease a relapse into sin followed and the same round of experience was repeated.

### AN INSPIRED SUMMARY

The story of the book is practically outlined for us in ~~1006~~ Judges 2:6-19, which takes the place of a summary, and suggests as the spiritual outline of its contents these four words:

1. Sin.
2. Punishment.
3. Repentance.
4. Deliverance.

## GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PERIOD

There are twelve judges named in the book unless we count Abimelech and Barak in the number, which would make fourteen. Abimelech was a conspirator and usurper (chap. 9) and is not usually counted a judge, as he was not of divine appointment. Barak was associated with Deborah and the honor of the judgeship is assigned to her rather than him.

It will stimulate interest in the book to read it through in advance, and if possible at a single reading, as far as the close of chapter 16, where the real history of the judges concludes. Use a sheet of paper and record the name of each judge and that of the nation from which he delivered Israel. You will find these nations were Mesopotamia, Moab, Philistia, Canaan, Midian and Ammon.

Now examine the map, or a Bible dictionary, and see where these nations were located on the north, east, south and west of Israel. This will raise the question as to whether the whole of Israel was in captivity to each of these nations at different times, or only those tribes which were in closest proximity to each.

If the latter be our conclusion, as seems likely, a second question arises as to whether each judge ruled over the whole of Israel at any time, or only so many of the tribes as he delivered from bondage? The latter seems the more probable, and gives a different conception of the history of the period from that commonly understood. It indicates that the periods of these judges were not necessarily successive, and that two or more may have been ruling at the same time in different parts of the land. It was this unsatisfactory state of things that was instrumental in moving the people to demand a king.

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK

As was stated above, the history of the judges so far as this book is concerned ends at chapter 16, the remaining chapters being supplementary. The dates given at the beginning of the book and at chapter 16 indicate the period covered to be about 300 years, to which might be added the time of Eli, if not Samuel, both of whom judged Israel, and whose story is found in the next book but one.

But even with these additions the period does not approximate that named in ~~4133~~ Acts 13:20, "about the space of 450 years until Samuel the prophet."

A perfectly satisfactory explanation of this disagreement cannot as yet be given, but a suggestion is that there is a divine chronology distinct from the human, whose center seems to be Israel. It is important to note, that God does not count time in the history of Israel while she is absent from her own land, or dominated by, or in captivity to, other nations.

The most striking illustration of this is in the present age. Nineteen hundred years in round numbers have elapsed since Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus and the Jews became scattered among the Gentiles, but the briefest mention is made of them in prophecy in all this time. When we reach the prophets we shall see that they break off their references to Israel at the time of this dispersion, and take it up again at their restoration at the end of this age, just as though no time had intervened. It is on this principle only that one can understand the meaning of the seventy weeks in ~~2700~~ Daniel 9.

Many minor illustrations of this are found in the Old Testament. Of Israel's thirty-eight years in the wilderness, when they were out of touch with God through disobedience, we are told almost nothing: Abram listened to Sarah concerning Hagar, which was a suggestion of the flesh, and we find a blank in his life of thirteen years (see ~~0166~~ Genesis 16:16 and 17:1). In the same way we may be able to explain this apparent discrepancy between the chronology in Judges and that in the Acts.

For example, during the captivities in Judges, the nation lost successively, 8, 18, 20, 7, 18 and 40 years, a total of 111 years (see ~~0008~~ Judges 3:8; 3:14; 4:3; 6:1; 10:8; 13:1). Add to these 111 years 200 during which they were said to have had rest, 136 during which they were ruled by judges, and you have precisely 450.

In the same way some would explain the seeming discrepancy between ~~1000~~ 1 Kings 6:1 and this passage in Acts. All of this is interesting and will be found more so as we come to other illustrations of the principle in later books.

## QUESTIONS

1. Give in a sentence or two the story of Judges.
2. How do you explain the spiritual decline of Israel during this period?

3. Give from memory a spiritual outline of the book.
4. How many judges are named in the book?
5. What reason is there to believe that the servitudes mentioned did not always extend over the whole of Israel at one time?
6. How does divine chronology seem to differ from the human?
7. On what principle only can we understand the meaning of the seventy weeks in ~~2001~~ Daniel 9?
8. Apply this principle to the apparent discrepancy between the chronology in Judges and Paul's reference to the period.

## JUDGES 1-3 — JOSHUA TO SHAMGAR

### JUDAH'S INCOMPLETE VICTORY (1:1-20)

After the death of Joshua the question of which tribe should lead in the subsequent campaign was answered by the Lord in the choice of Judah (vv. 1-2) which was in accordance with the divine prophecy through Jacob (~~4008~~ Genesis 49:8). Doubtless the inquiry was made by Urim and Thummim on the breastplate of the high priest, to which reference was made in Exodus.

Judah invites the cooperation of Simeon because the territory of the latter was contiguous and intermixed with Judah (v. 3).

These tribes are guilty of barbarity in the case of Adonibezek (vv. 5-7), but it is not to be supposed that God commended this action. It was, however, in accordance with the warfare in that day, and even the heathen king admitted the justification of the act in his case.

The defeat in verse 19 is explained not by the lack of power in the case of Judah, but by unbelief.

### SIMILAR EXPERIENCES OF THE OTHER TRIBES (1:21-36)

Judah's example of unbelief is followed by all the tribes named in the conclusion of this chapter, Benjamin, Ephraim (the house of Joseph), Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher and Naphtali. Note particularly verse 21 in comparison with verse 8. The border of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, seems to have run through Jerusalem, and while the first named

expelled the heathen from their part of the city, the latter were unable to do so and, this city did not fully come into possession of Israel until David's time.

### **DIVINE WARNING (2:1-5)**

The Revised Version indicates by the definite article before "angel," in verse 1, that He who came from Gilgal to Bochim to warn Israel was the Angel of the Covenant, who appeared in human form as the Captain of the Lord's host to Joshua. In other words, the Second Person of the Trinity. It was a serious indictment He laid against them and an awful penalty He announced (vv. 1-3). No wonder the people wept, but would to God their sorrow had been to better purpose. The result shows how temporary it was and how little confidence may be put in tears for sin, which do not mean amendment of life.

### **THE SUMMARY OF THE BOOK (2:6-23)**

We called attention to these verses in the preceding lesson as giving an outline of the whole story of Judges. Verse 6-10 are copied from Joshua 24, and inserted here to explain the warning preceding. The following verses should be read with care, because they give the key, not only to Judges, but to 1 Samuel and the whole of this period of Israel until the monarchy.

In explanation of verse 16 the Bible Commentary speaks of the judges as God's viceregents in the government of Israel, He Himself being the supreme ruler. There was no regular unbroken succession of judges, but individuals prompted by the Spirit of God were from time to time aroused and empowered to achieve deliverance. They were without pomp or emolument, and had no power to make laws. In a special sense, however, they were executors of the law and avengers of crimes, especially that of idolatry.

### **OTHNIEL, THE FIRST JUDGE (3:1-11)**

After enumerating the nations left in the land unconquered, and the reason for permitting them to remain, the story takes up the first general apostasy of Israel and the rule of the first judge. Notice in verses 1-4 the interacting of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We have seen the reason why these nations were not exterminated from the human point of view to

be a lack of faith, but from the divine point of view there was another reason. God permits these nations to remain, as a school for Israel in the art of war (v. 2), and, as an instrument for their discipline in divine things (v. 4).

From intermarrying with these nations the Israelites soon came to serve their gods (vv. 6-7). When therefore they turned their back upon Jehovah, He, in a sense, turned His back upon them, so that they were compelled to serve the Mesopotamians eight years (v. 8). Distress followed sin and repentance resulted from distress. Whereupon God raised up a deliverer in Othniel, whose history has been spoken of before (vv. 9-10). No details are given of this war, though it must have been a serious struggle. Othniel is victorious and rules Israel in peace for forty years (v. 11).

### **EHUD, THE SECOND JUDGE (3:12-30)**

When Israel again fell into sin, God's scourge against them was the Moabites, who joined their earlier enemies, the Amorites and Amalekites, in a successful conquest for eighteen years (v. 14), when distress and repentance are again followed by deliverance.

It makes the blood run cold to read what Ehud did, but we must remember that he was not a murderer but a warrior, and the world has always made a distinction between these two. His act was not one of personal revenge, but patriotic and religious fervor. Moreover, while he was doing God's service in the general sense of that term, his deed is nowhere approved in Scripture. This last remark suggests an important qualification, to which attention has been called before, and which should be applied in instances of a similar character in the Bible record. Further, a shadow seems to hang over the official career of this man, for his name is not praised in Israel, neither is it said anywhere that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, nor that he judged Israel. These omissions may be without significance, but are they not noticeable?

### **SHAMGAR, THE THIRD JUDGE (3:31)**

The notice of this judgeship is brief and limited to a conflict with the Philistines. The ox goad with which he slew six hundred men is as an implement eight feet long and about six inches in circumference. At one end it has a sharp prong for driving cattle, and at another a small iron

paddle for removing the clay which encumbers the plow in working. Such an instrument wielded by a strong man would do great execution.

### QUESTION

1. What tribe takes the lead after Joshua's death?
2. What heathen people inhabited Jerusalem?
3. Name a theophany in this lesson.
4. What illustration of divine sovereignty and human responsibility does it contain?
5. Do you know the location of Mesopotamia?
6. Is God necessarily responsible for the atrocities named in this lesson?
7. What can you say about the story of Shamgar?

## JUDGES 4-5 — THE ERA OF DEBORAH

### THE SERVITUDE TO CANAAN (CHAP. 4)

We met before with "Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor" (see Joshua 11), but this seems to have been a second of the name who built a new capitol on the ruins of the former one. The Israelites failed to exterminate these enemies on the north, who had now become strong enough to visit them with the severest oppression they had yet experienced, and which lasted twenty years (v. 3).

Deborah's appearance on the scene (v. 4) is remarkable, who stands out uniquely in the sacred history of her nation. There was no predecessor and no successor like her. The palm tree under which she dwelt (v. 5) may mean the open air court where justice was administered during her judgeship.

While a judge, she was not a military leader, hence the call for Barak to rally Naphtali and Zebulun which were in proximity to the enemy and suffered the heaviest oppression (v. 6). This was not her call, but God's call communicated in some special way to her, and it was God, and not Barak, who was to deliver the enemy into their hands (v. 7).

Barak's reply may not have been such an evidence of weakness as it appears, since the presence of the prophetess would encourage the troops and add sanction to the conflict (v. 8). Nevertheless, it met with rebuke (v. 9) and an ultimate disappointment very humiliating to a conqueror.

Notice that this was the Lord's battle, and not man's (v. 15), as we have seen so many times in the history of Israel. That the panic was caused in a supernatural way is seen in verse 5:20.

### *Jael's Savage Deed*

No apology can be made for the action of Jael the Kenite woman of verses 17-21. Her house was at peace with the Canaanites. She had invited the fugitive into her dwelling. She had given him the special protection of the women's apartment, always sacred to the Oriental, and she had come upon him unawares with probably one of the pins with which the tent ropes are fastened to the ground. She was the meanest of maddest murderers.

It must not be supposed that although her action was foreknown to God it was sanctioned by Him; neither that because Deborah praises it in her song (chap. 5), therefore she is pronouncing a eulogy on the moral character of the woman.

The following is the manner in which *The Expositor's Bible* refers to it:

Jael is no blameless heroine, neither is she a demon. Deborah, who understands her, reads clearly the rapid thoughts, the swift decision, the unscrupulous act, and sees, behind all, the purpose of serving Israel. The praise of Jael is therefore with knowledge, but she herself would not have done the thing she praises.

Not here can the moral be found that the end justifies the means, or that we may do evil with good intent, which never was a Bible doctrine, and never can be. On the contrary, we find it written clearly that the end does not justify the means.

Rightly does Christian society affirm that a human being in any extremity common to men, is to be succored without inquiry whether he is good or bad.

Law is to be of no private, sudden, unconsidered administration. Only in the most solemn and orderly way is the trial of the worst malefactor to be gone about, sentence passed, justice executed. To have reached this



understanding of law with regard to all accused and suspected persons is one of the great gains of the Christian period.

We need not look for anything like the ideal of justice in the age of the Judges; deeds were done then and honestly praised which we must condemn. They were meant to bring about good, but the sum of human violence was increased by them, and more work made for the reformer of after times.

### **DEBORAH'S SONG (CHAP. 5)**

The words of this chapter appear in better form in the Revised Version, where they are arranged as poetry.

The song begins with a reference to God's interposition on behalf of His people by a storm (vv. 4-5). Then the condition of the people is depicted (vv. 6-7) and their apostasy from God (v. 8). This latter was the cause of their affliction.

Praise is spoken for the tribal leaders and especially for God in the help rendered in extremity (v. 9), and all the great and wealthy are urged to join in it (vv. 10-11).

At verse 12, Deborah bestirs herself to greater flights of fancy, and Barak is urged to parade his prisoners in triumph. Then follows an account of the tribes of Israel which assisted in the conflict, Ephraim, who dwelt near the Amalekites, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar. Reuben is reproached for abiding among the sheepfold, and Gad, Dan and Asher for not leaving their ships to assist in the fight. Zebulun and Naphtali are again especially commended (vv. 14-18).

The battle is described. Jabin seems to have been reinforced by other kings, who joined him without any money recompense (v. 19). The storm helped Israel, swelling the river so that the enemy were sunk in the quick-sands, or washed into the sea (vv. 20-21).

The story of Jael's action follows in verses 24-27. Butter in verse 25 seems to refer to curdled milk. From Jael a transition is made to the mother of Sisera, the Canaanitish commander, who is looking through the window wondering why her son is so long in returning from the battle. Her companions help her to the answer by suggesting that the victors have waited to divide the prey (vv. 28-30).

The song concludes with an invocation to Jehovah in verse 31.

The land now rested for forty years.

It is to be remembered that this was a song of Deborah, and not a song of God. The record of the song is inspired by God, and in that sense is part of His Word, but it is not to be supposed that the Spirit of God indicted it, as is true of some other parts of Holy Writ.

A parallel has been found in the history of Oliver Cromwell, in whose letter after the storming of Bristol he ascribes the victory to God, saying, "They that have been employed in this service know that faith and prayer obtained this service for you. God hath put the sword in the parliament's hands for the terror of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well."

This may have been true, and yet God should not be held accountable for everything that Cromwell did or said with reference to that action.

## QUESTIONS

1. To what part of Canaan is our attention called in this lesson?
2. Which tribes seemed to have taken the lead in this conflict?
3. Name some evidences of supernatural interposition.
4. Is Jael's action justifiable?
5. Of what does this lesson speak as one of the gains of Christian teaching?
6. Make an analysis of Deborah's song.
7. Where does inspiration terminate in this case, in the thoughts of Deborah or in the record of her thoughts?
8. Where has a parallel been found in modern history?

## JUDGES 6-8 — GIDEON AND THE MIDIANITES

The old story of sin and suffering is repeated after the death of Deborah. The Midianites occupied territory on the south and east, contiguous to Moab, and were wandering herdsmen like the modern Bedouins, who, in connection with the Amalekites, harassed Israel at every opportunity with the results indicated in ~~xxx~~Judges 6:1-6.

God sends a prophet to His people in this case before He sends a Savior (vv. 7-10), for they must be brought to repentance before deliverance can be vouchsafed.

### **GIDEON CALLED (6:11-24)**

"An angel of the Lord" (v. 11), should read "The angel," for the context shows this to be another manifestation of the Second Person of the Trinity. Study the context for evidences of this. Observe Gideon's consciousness of it, the angel's assumption of it (vv. 14 and 16), and its final demonstration (vv. 21-23). Note Gideon's modesty and diffidence (v. 15), suggesting Moses at the burning bush. His request for a sign (v. 17) is neither wrong nor unreasonable as the event shows. Although the acceptance of his sacrifice meant the acceptance of himself (v. 21), yet so deep-seated is fear in the heart because of sin (v. 22), that he needs a special assurance from Jehovah to restore his peace after he has become conscious of the Divine Presence (v. 23).

### **THE ENSIGN RAISED (6:25-32)**

Immediately upon his call Gideon enters upon service (v. 25). The "second bullock" of his father is named probably because the first had been stolen by the enemy. The father was an idolator like the rest, it would appear, and the altar on his ground may have been one for public use. Secrecy is necessary in destroying this altar (v. 27), as the commotion following evidences (vv. 28-30). Joash's defense of his son suggests Elijah on Matthew Carmel (~~<1180>~~ 1 Kings 18), and, in another sense, Gamaliel before the Sanhedrin (~~<480>~~ Acts 5), or the town clerk at Ephesus (~~<480>~~ Acts 19).

### **THE BATTLE ARRAYED (6:32-40)**

"The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" (v. 34). The margin of the Revised Version says, "The Spirit of the Lord clothed Himself with Gideon," an Old Testament way of speaking of the filling of the Spirit of which the New Testament so often speaks in connection with Christian experience (see ~~<458>~~ Ephesians 5:18). No wonder that Gideon could "do exploits" (~~<213>~~ Daniel 11:32), under such circumstances. This explains the gathering of the people to Gideon's standard (v. 35).

And yet Gideon's weak faith calls for another sign — two of them indeed (vv. 36-39) — For he has reached a second crisis in his career, and God condescends to manifest it (vv. 38, 40).

### THE VICTORY WON (7:1-23)

This must be God's victory and not man's, therefore, although 32,000 men (v. 3) were few enough against an army "as grasshoppers for multitude" (6:5), they must be reduced still further. For the first test (v. 3), compare ~~4:18~~ Deuteronomy 20:8, the second (vv. 4-7) was unique. Wandering tribes in Asia, when in haste, do not stoop deliberately on their knees to drink water, but only bend forward to bring their hand in contact with the stream, and throw up the water rapidly and with great expertness into their mouths. The Israelites who chose to do so on this occasion were the earnest and energetic ones fitted for the expedition God now had in mind.

What a trial of faith to attach an overwhelming force with only three hundred men! No wonder Gideon needed another sign to reassure him for the engagement, which God now vouchsafed to him.

Observe the expression in verse 9: "Arise, get thee down unto the host." The latter were in the valley and attention to this is of importance to understand something of what follows. The dream and its interpretation in their effect on Gideon require no explanation. They were God's way of animating the little band of Israelites and they had such result.

But if the smallness of the army is astonishing, what shall we say of the foolishness of their armament (vv. 16-18)? Compare ~~4:18~~ 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. The pitchers concealed the lamps, which were what we call torches, and being earthenware were easily broken. The three hundred men were divided into three bands that they might seem to be surrounding the camp. Suddenly, in the darkness and stillness of the night, a loud echo of trumpets is heard, followed by a mighty shout from every side; a blaze encircles the camp, and the sleepers started from their rest and supernaturally alarmed as they doubtless were, run tumultuously hither and thither, not knowing friend from foe, and soon precipitately flee (vv. 19-22). "The men of Israel" who pursued after them, were either the 10,000 or the 32,000 who had lingered near the scene and were now ready to join in the fight when everything appeared so hopeful.

## THE CAMPAIGN EXTENDED (8:1-21)

Verses 1-4 require little comment, but should not be passed over without observing Gideon's modesty and greatness in soothing the wounded pride of Ephraim (compare <sup><3150></sup>Proverbs 15:1 and <sup><3104></sup>Philippians 2:4).

"The men of Succoth" (v. 5) and those of Penuel (v. 8), were of the tribe of Gad, but one would hardly think they were of Israel at all by the way they acted in this case. They were afraid of the Midianitish kings, and doubted Gideon's ability to overcome them. Verse 14 shows that it was the chief men of these places that had treated him thus, and whom he now returns to punish. "He taught the men" (v. 16) means according to the margin that he threshed them. The method was placing thorns and briars on the naked body and pressing them down by heavy implements of some kind. Cruel torture, but we can say nothing more about it than in the cases of cruelty mentioned earlier.

The Midianitish kings had slain Gideon's brothers (vv. 18-19) and it was his duty as nearest of kin to take requital, although he offered the honor to his son (v. 20). Jether failing in the premises, Gideon acted the part (v. 21).

## END OF GIDEON'S LIFE (8:22-32)

The tribes would have made Gideon king (v. 22) had not the latter showed his loyalty to God, and to them also by declining the offer (v. 23). He would be judge, but Jehovah must be King. And yet he made a mistake, though not intentionally perhaps, in what follows (vv. 24-27). In other words, there seems no reason to believe that he had idolatry in view in what he did, although after his decease it worked that way (v. 33). What he had in mind apparently was an ephod for his use as a civil magistrate as in David's case later (<sup><3157></sup>1 Chronicles 15:27).

## QUESTIONS

1. Where were the Midianites located with reference to Israel?
2. How many signs in all does God grant Gideon?
3. To what tribe did the men of Succoth belong?
4. Give two or three illustrations of Gideon's modesty.
5. How long did he judge Israel?

## JUDGES 9-10:5 — GIDEON TO JAIR

### ABIMELECH'S USURPATION (9:1-6)

The close of the last lesson shows idolatry creeping into Israel, the fruit of which is reaped in the years following. God is forgotten and Gideon also (8:34-35), the meaning of the last verse being interpreted by the story of Abimelech.

This Abimelech fraternized with his nearest of kin, the relatives of his mother's side (vv. 1-3), a striking instance, as one says, of the evils of polygamy, where one son of a father has connections and interests totally alien to his brethren. Contrast the verses just alluded to with 8:22-23 and observe the difference in spirit and motive between father and son.

What is meant by the allusion to the "one stone" in verse 5 on which Abimelech slew his brothers, it is difficult to say. Some think he dashed them from one rock, and others that the stone was the pagan altar on which their lives were sacrificed.

### JOTHAM'S PARABLE (9:7-21)

The reason Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, was spared from the general slaughter is given in verse 5. The spot chosen for his proclamation was the public place of Shechem, and "the parable drawn from the rivalry of the various trees was appropriate to the foliage in the valley below." With a little exertion of voice it is said he could easily be heard in the city.

Someone may ask an explanation of verse 13, and in what sense wine could be said to "cheer" God? Jotham not being present to explain the expression, we are at a loss, for it is not God who is here speaking, but man, whose word God is causing to be recorded. Wine was sometimes used in sacrifices as was oil. The latter is said to "honor" God (v. 9), and perhaps in the same sense it is meant that wine cheered Him.

Note the malediction Jotham pronounces on Abimelech and Shechem (v. 20), and the fulfillment we reach at the close of chapter 9. Thus would it appear that Jotham was in this case a prophet and minister of God.

### GAUL'S CONSPIRACY (9:22-49)

The combination of Abimelech's usurpation and Shechem's idolatry did not work well, for by and by God sent a judgment upon them (vv. 22-25). Gaal, who, some think, represented the original Canaanites of the locality, took advantage of the feeling against Abimelech and raised an insurrection (vv. 26-29). Zebul, the ruler of the city, is loyal, and informs on him (vv. 30-33) with the result following (vv. 34-40). Subsequently Shechem itself is destroyed (vv. 41-45), and the people who took refuge in the stronghold consumed with fire (vv. 46-49).

### ABIMELECH'S DEATH (9:50-57)

A subsequent campaign against Thebez, now called Tubas, was not so successful (vv. 50-55), and Abimelech like Sisera, came to his end at the hand of a woman. Thus his evil deeds met their reward (vv. 56-57).

### THE JUDGESHIPS OF TOLA AND JAIR (10:1-5)

Not much is said about these two judges, and yet together they ruled forty-five years. As foreign aggression is not spoken of, the probability is that the "defense" or saving of Israel referred to was from internal dissension of usurpation like that of Abimelech. For this cause they have sometimes been called "civil" judges.

Something of the magnificence of the second of the two may be gathered from verse 4. To ride on an ass is characteristic of royalty in those times, and if each of these sons did that, and each had his own city to rule, Jair's possessions were extensive. Havoth-jair, interpreted into English, means "the towns of Jair."

It will be interesting to compare <sup><0624></sup>Numbers 32:41, <sup><0634></sup>Deuteronomy 3:14 and <sup><0622></sup>1 Chronicles 2:22 for the story of an earlier Jair. Although the two have points of unusual similarity they were evidently different persons.

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the spiritual condition of Israel following Gideon's death?
2. Give the history of Abimelech's rise to power.
3. Recite Jotham's parable and give its application.
4. What shows Jotham to have been a prophet?

5. Give the history of Shechem's destruction.
6. With what earlier military captain may Abimelech be compared in his death?
7. What characteristic has sometimes been given the judgeships of Tola and Jair, and why?
8. What is the meaning of Havoth-jair?
9. Have you compared the histories of the two Jairs?

## JUDGES 10:6-12:7 — JEPHTHAH AND HIS VOW

### OPPRESSION EAST AND WEST (10:6-18)

The story of these verses suggests that preceding the deliverance of Gideon's time (chap. 6). There seem, indeed, to have been no such widespread idolatry and iniquity in Israel before, and for eighteen years the nation suffered at the hands of the Ammonites on the east and the Philistines on the west (v. 8). The Ammonites were very bold and pressed their conquests across the Jordan (v. 9).

The repentance of Israel (v. 10) seems to have been genuine for there is no cloaking of their sin, and yet Jehovah would put in the plow deeper (vv. 11-14). Just how the communication of these verses was made the record says not. It may have been gathered in substance from the providences in the case, or it may have come directly through the high priest; probably the latter. Nevertheless, when they are ripe for mercy the mercy comes (vv. 15-16). The ripeness is shown in their putting away sin, and making their backs bare for the punishment, whatever it may be, "Do anything you will to us, O Lord, but send deliverance." When the sinner in the present dispensation gets into this place of surrender, help through Christ is not long delayed. Compare the close of Romans 7 with the opening verses of the next chapter in that epistle.

### JEPHTHAH THE DELIVERER (11:1-11)

Jephthah was low-born and had a hard time of it (vv. 1-3). He was at the head of a band of outlaws, with a history not unlike David at one time; but he was a gallant leader and his innings have come at last (vv. 4-11). Notice that Jephthah was not without a knowledge of God as shown in verses 9



and 11, so that with all his roving habits and his life of plundering on his enemies, the Ammonites perhaps, he may have been more godly and loyal than the people who cast him out.

### **THE AMBASSAGE TO AMMON (11:12-28)**

The record of these verses is self-explanatory, and is noticeable, first, for Ammon's false assumption based on an untrue interpretation of history (vv. 12-13); second, Jephthah's acquaintance with Israel's past, pointing to the accuracy with which the records were kept, notwithstanding the long period of turmoil since Moses's day (vv. 14-22); and third, his abounding faith in Jehovah's power in the premises (vv. 23-27).

### **JEPHTHAH'S VOW (11:29-40)**

The vow of Jephthah is celebrated for its awfulness and, like others, we have tried to explain it in some other than its literal sense, but the effort has not brought satisfaction. We can understand why he made it, because it was a custom with heathen chieftains on the eve of battle to promise their gods oblations or booty; and also because vows were practiced by the Israelites and approved of God, as we saw in Leviticus 27 and other scriptures, although, of course, not vows of this kind. Jephthah lived beyond the Jordan, far from the tabernacle, and on the borders of a heathen country, where human sacrifices were common. It was, too, a time of great spiritual declension in Israel. All these things are to be considered, and yet why did he do it, and why did God permit it, abhorrent to Him as it must have been, if it absolutely occurred? We might as well ask the old question, Why did God permit sin? We can say nothing in answer, but simply wait. There are many mysteries to try our faith and patience. One thing is certain, it furnishes an awful lesson against rash and hasty vows.

It is but just to add that the other view of this matter is that Jephthah consecrates his daughter to a life of virginal service. This indeed would have been a serious sacrifice to him as it ended his hopes as the head of his line, inasmuch as she was his only child. It also deprived her of the crown of motherhood. Verses 39-40 are thought to offer justification of this "life of service" view.

## CLOSE OF JEPHTHAH'S CAREER (12:1-7)

Ephraim shows the same jealous spirit in this case as in the earlier time of Gideon. They wanted the glory without earning it, and, although Jephthah dealt with them almost as tactfully as his predecessor, the issue was different (vv. 1-3).

Verse 6 shows the test by which the escaping Ephraimite was discovered. *Shibboleth* means a stream, and *sibboleth* a burden. The appropriateness in the demand that they pronounce the first word is that they were trying to pass the fords of Jordan. The Ephraimites had a dialect peculiarity that identified them anywhere.

### QUESTIONS

1. How long was Israel in bondage at this time and to what peoples?
2. How does she testify her sincere repentance?
3. Have you examined the passages in Romans?
4. Give the early history of Jephthah.
5. Give evidences of his reverence for Jehovah.
6. Give the story of Jephthah's debate with Ammon.
7. Give the story of his vow.
8. Give the story of the word *shibboleth*.

## JUDGES 13-16 — SAMSON THE NAZARITE

The close of chapter 12 furnishes the history of three other civil judges, and then we reach that of another warrior as picturesque as Gideon or Jephthah. Sampson's life is so full of inconsistencies and mysteries from the divine standpoint, that again we can only await the explanations until we shall know as we are known.

### THE PROMISED SON (CHAP. 13)

Here is another theophany, for "the angel of the Lord" is none other than Jehovah — Jesus.

The beginning of this captivity to the Philistines is recorded in chapter 10:6, apparently, when the historian digresses to speak of the probably

simultaneous captivity to the Ammonites on the east and here returns to the south again.

Zorah (v. 2) was in the tribe of Dan on the border of Judah, and hence approximate to the Philistine country. For the law of the Nazarite, compare <sup><011></sup>Numbers 6. Manoah and his wife were of faith and piety remarkable for these times, as illustrated in the former's prayer (v. 8). Verse 16 identifies the angel with Jehovah. The word "secret" (v. 18) is, in the Revised Version, "wonderful," and harmonizes with the name of Christ given in <sup><239></sup>Isaiah 9:6. "Wondrously" (v. 19) is the same word.

The angel's words (v. 16) are similar to those of our Lord in <sup><017></sup>Matthew 19:17, and spoken for the same reason, viz: to instruct Manoah that the viands must be offered, not to a human prophet or an ordinary angel, but to the Lord Himself.

While both husband and wife had faith, the latter seemed to possess the better spiritual understanding, as judged by verses 22-23. She was able to draw a logical inference, and her words offer a suggestive

### *Text for a Gospel Sermon*

<sup><012></sup>Judges 13:23 suggests "God's Love — Proven by His Work." His manifestation in the flesh of Jesus Christ, His sacrifice and resurrection from the dead, and His revelations in the written Word, to follow the outline of verse 23, are all evidences of His purpose to eternally save them that believe.

## **SWEET FROM THE STRONG (CHAP. 14)**

The key to this chapter: Jehovah by retributive proceedings, was about to destroy the Philistine power, and the means he chose was not an army but the miraculous prowess of this single-handed champion. In such circumstances the provocation to hostilities could only spring out of a private quarrel, and this marriage seems to have been suggested to Samson as the way to bring it about. See verse 4 as authority for this line of thought.

In the East parents negotiated the marriages of their sons, and the Israelites were not commanded against intermarrying with the Philistines as they were not of the accursed nations.

It may not be that Samson loved this woman so much, as that he found her well-suited for his purpose, which may explain the last clause of verse 3.

Observe that it was by the Spirit of the Lord, i.e., through superhuman courage and strength, he was enabled to slay the lion (v. 6), an incidental circumstance by which with others of the kind, he was gradually trained to trust in God for greater and more public work.

The bees are clean creatures, and time enough must have elapsed for the sun and birds of prey to have put the lion's carcass in fit condition for their use (vv. 8-9). The thirty companions (v. 11) were to honor Samson, and yet the outcome shows that they were there with ulterior motives also. "Sheets" (v. 12) means linen garments. "If ye had not plowed with my heifer" (v. 18) means if ye had not used my wife to deceive me. There must have been some reason why Samson went to Ashkelon (v. 19), and it is thought the men of that city were particularly hostile to Israel. Verse 20, compared with the first two verses of the next chapter, indicates base treachery to Samson, which might well arouse just resentment.

### **THE HILL OF THE JAWBONE (CHAP. 15)**

Samson now feels that he has a reason for revenge (v. 3), which (with assistance perhaps) he executes in verses 4-5. The margin of the Revised Version translates "foxes" as jackals, a cross between a wolf and a fox, which prowl in packs. Two of these were tied together, tail by tail, a slow fire brand being fastened between each pair. The brand lighted, they were started down the hillside into cornfields, and, of course, nothing could stop them as they ran widely here and there.

The remainder of the chapter calls for little explanation, except to say that the slaughter accomplished by the jawbone of the ass must have been, like the breaking of the cords that bound Samson, a supernatural act.

### **THE PILLARS OF THE TEMPLE (CHAP. 16)**

The event at Gaza is discreditable to Samson both on account of his sinful conduct and the careless exposure of his life to his enemies, but God is still pleased to continue His power toward him (v. 3).

The event with Delilah is equally discreditable and he pays the penalty for it (v. 21). Of course Samson's strength did not lie in his hair, but in God (v.

17), and in the consecration of his life to Him as symbolized by the growth of his hair. He broke his Nazarite vow by cutting it and in that sense cut himself off from God. The loss of spiritual power to the Christian is always accompanied by grinding in the prison-house of sin.

But how merciful God was to Samson that on his repentance, as evidenced in the growth of his hair again, He should have vouchsafed power to Him once more, albeit it was to use him further as an executioner (vv. 22-30). It is important to bear this latter point in mind, to relieve Samson of the charge of suicide. He put forth his strength against the pillars of the temple in the exercise of his office as a public magistrate, and his death was that of a martyr to his country's cause. His prayer was doubtless a silent one, but the fact that God revealed it and caused it to be recorded is an evidence that it was heard and approved.

As we dwell on the biographies of these judges, so reprehensible, and yet so used of God, we see the great distinction between a holy life and simply power for service. There are Christians seeking the latter who appear indifferent to the former, but for the individual in eternity it is the former that counts and not the latter. God may use any man, but it is only the holy man who seeks to do His will who pleases Him. Let our ambition be not to do great things so much as to be acceptable to Christ when He comes (2 Cot. 5:9). Samson, Like Jephthah, is honored for his faith in God (<sup><38132></sup>Hebrews 11:32), and it was great, but he could never be honored for anything else.

## QUESTION

1. Name the three judges referred to in the close of chapter 12. 2. Define the law of the Nazarite. 3. Quote <sup><2906></sup>Isaiah 9:6.
4. Quote <sup><40917></sup>Matthew 19:17 and explain it.
5. Quote <sup><07323></sup>Judges 13:23 and expound it, giving topics and divisions.
6. State the key to chapter 14.
7. What is the meaning of "sheets" in 14:12?
8. Describe the burning of the Philistine cornfields.
9. Where lay Samson's strength?
10. Was Samson a suicide?
11. Which is preferable, and why, power for service or a holy life?

12. Quote ~~4:10~~ 2 Corinthians 5:9.

## JUDGES 17-21 — APPENDIX TO THE BOOK

The chapters concluding the book detail certain incidents at various periods during the preceding history, when the whole nation was disordered and corrupt, and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

### A MAN-MADE PRIEST (CHAP. 17)

Chapter 17 tells of Micah who established his own imitation of the tabernacle. Of course it was contrary to the law and evinced ignorance and superstition, although the motive may not have been bad.

### ORIGIN OF THE CITY OF DAN (CHAP. 18)

Chapter 18 carries the story further. It shows how Micah lost his tabernacle, and his priest obtained a broader field. The Danites wanted more territory and dispatched five men to search out a good place (vv. 1-2). By accident they discovered Micah's self-made "priest" and sought counsel of him, which was as ambiguous as the heathen oracles (vv. 3-6). Nevertheless they came to a town called Laish, which seemed a desirable and easy prey, and which they persuaded the men of war of their tribe to advance upon (vv. 7-12). Passing through Micah's town on their errand, they impressed his priest into their service (vv. 13-21), and, although Micah and his fellow townsmen pursued them, it was without avail (vv. 22-26). They overcame Laish at the end, built their city there and called it Daniel. They also continued their idolatrous worship introduced by Micah's priest, down to the captivity (vv. 27-31).

### AN AWFUL DEED AND AN AWFUL RETRIBUTION (CHAPS. 19-21)

Chapters 19-21 tell an awful story of lust, civil war and pillage fearfully illustrative of a world without God.

A Levite, after the manner of those days, married a secondary wife who proved unfaithful. Returning to her father's house at Bethlehem, he followed her to persuade her to come back (19:1-4). After a few days they

start their journey accompanied by a servant, lodging the first night at Gibeah (19:5-21). Here wicked men abuse the concubine until she dies; her husband, his servant and his host acting so discredibly as to be almost unbelievable, were it not for the sacred record of the fact (19:22-28).

Subsequently her husband took a remarkable way of obtaining redress, explicable only on the absence of regular government among the tribes. He divided the corpse into twelve pieces and distributed them with the story of the wrong among all the tribes, so that the latter came together saying: "There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day; consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds" (19:29-30).

The result was a conference of the tribes at Mizpeh (20:1). The phrase "unto the Lord" is possibly explained by the circumstance that Mizpeh was near Shiloh, the place of the tabernacle, and that the leaders went there to consult Jehovah, if haply he would reveal His mind at this crisis, through the high priest.

The Levite is now given an opportunity to state his case formally, in which he inferentially lodges a complaint against the whole tribe of Benjamin, as Gibeah was in its territory (20:4-7).

The decision is to punish that city (20:8-11), but first to demand that the perpetrators of the crime be surrendered for execution, which Benjamin, through pride or some other reason refuses to do (20:12-13). Internecine war follows, in which the Benjamites are at first successful, but in the end succumbed to the greater numbers and the strategy of the united tribes (20:14-48).

### *Humbling Experiences and Their Cause*

But why, if the united tribes asked counsel of the lord, and acted on it were they so unsuccessful at first, and why did they suffer so heavily? Perhaps they did not seek it early enough. Their own plans seem to have been formed first, and all they sought of the Lord was to name their leader (20:18). It was their disasters that seemed to bring them to their senses and to the Lord, in real earnestness, and then the tables were turned (20:26-28).

It is notable that Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, was their high priest, indicating the time to be not long after Joshua's death.

### *Folly upon Folly*

All that was left of Benjamin was six hundred men (20:47), for it appears that all the women and children were slain. Now, the other tribes had sworn that they would not give their daughters to the Benjamites for wives, and the result was that the whole of that tribe was likely to become extinct — another illustration of a rash vow.

Ashamed of their folly, they repented of it, but not to the extent of taking back their vows (21:1-8). Instead of this, having discovered that none of the men of Jabesh-gilead had gathered to the battle, they determined to destroy its inhabitants, with the exception of the unmarried women, and give the latter to the Benjamites (21:8-15).

But there were not enough of these to suffice. Therefore, they decided upon the expedient of permitting 200 more to be stolen by the Benjamites from the other tribes under the circumstances narrated in <sup><17216></sup>Judges 21:16-23.

No wonder the book closes with the refrain heard several times before, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

### QUESTIONS

1. What designation might be given to the closing chapters of the book?
2. Did these events come presumably after the last judgeship, or before?
3. State the history of the city of Dan.
4. What was the occasion of the war between Benjamin and the other tribes?
5. What means were taken to perpetuate Benjamin?
6. How is the disorder in Israel explained?
7. Was a divine or human king required the more?