

The Book of Judges

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(1988 Study)

The following notes on the Book of Judges were compiled from a Bible study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1988. They should be utilized with the following understanding:

1. Each paragraph preceded by “**Comment**” or “**Q**” (an abbreviation for “**Question**”) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank did not review the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1988)

Judges 1:1 Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

Judges 1:2 And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

Even though the Israelites settled more or less in their prescribed territories, that did not mean they had ferreted out the enemy from all of these locations. Judah had been assigned a very large territory. Simeon was located in the tribe of Judah and thus had an inferior position. Specifically, Simeon possessed various villages sprinkled throughout Judah (Josh. 19:1-9).

After the death of their great leader Joshua, it was logical for the Israelites to wonder, before they began any new enterprise, who would now lead them. They must have been somewhat startled to receive the reply from Jehovah that Judah, and not an individual, would “go up” against the Canaanites. Of course the Israelites needed some type of leadership, so the thought would be that those who were considered the more outstanding individuals—the princes in Judah—would assume a leadership role, but no particular individual at present.

Judges 1:3 And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.

Judah wisely asked Simeon, his brother, to go up with him into his “lot” to fight against the Canaanites, and Judah would likewise go up with Simeon into his “lot.” The Revised Standard Version gives Judah’s words as follows: “Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you.”

This suggestion does not mean that both tribes had a well-defined territory in the southern part of the nation. Rather, as previously explained, Simeon’s territory consisted of specific villages, and Judah had definite boundaries.

Judges 1:4 And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.

Judah and Simeon were victorious, for they slew 10,000 Canaanites and Perizzites. The Canaanites occupied an area, with their strong cities, somewhat along the coast of Judah in what is called the Gaza Strip today.

Comment: Quite a number of enemies still remained in the land at this time for such a large number to be slain.

Reply: Yes, and presumably the slain were fighting men.

Judges 1:5 And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Judges 1:6 But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

Judges 1:7 And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath required me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Comment: It is favorable that Adoni-bezek recognized his own fate as retribution for having cut off the thumbs and big toes of 70 other kings.

Adoni-bezek must have been a warrior to have defeated 70 other leaders in various territories. He had further humiliated the kings by having them pick up scraps of food under his table almost like dogs. Now his haughty spirit was tempered by his own humiliation.

Q: Would Adoni-bezek have been thinking of the God of the Israelites when he said, “As I have done, so God hath required me”? Did Adoni-bezek feel that the deity Israel worshipped was now humiliating him?

A: He was not necessarily thinking of Jehovah. No doubt several of these nations did recognize a god, or a higher authority—a supreme being—but under their own title or name and with different characteristics. In addition, they would have had multiple other gods and goddesses.

Judges 1:8 Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

Here we are told that the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, taken it, smitten the inhabitants, and burned the city, yet David, under Joab, did not capture Jebus until about 500 years later (1 Chron. 11:4-6). How do we harmonize the two accounts? The majority of the city was captured at this earlier date, but the little stronghold, the hill of the Jebusites, remained under Canaanite control until David’s day. David established that place as his capital city.

Thus Jerusalem included the suburbs to a certain extent and was not just the city of the Jebusites that was taken later. In other words, Judah and Simeon captured the suburbs but not the stronghold hill of the Jebusites.

Jerusalem today includes the Israeli-occupied new Jerusalem in contradistinction to the old Jerusalem, which consists of two parts: (1) the “Old City” within the walls and (2) a reasonably large mostly Arab-occupied sector outside the walls on the north side.

Judges 1:9 And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley.

Here the term “Canaanites” is used in a more limited sense, as opposed to the embracive term used elsewhere that included many different enemies such as Hittites, Perizzites, and Amorites. Remnants of the Canaanites were scattered over quite a large territory of hills and valleys.

Judges 1:10 And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-arba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai.

When Abraham was in Hebron, he had only a very small territory and had to go down near Beersheba and live like a bedouin, even though he was wealthy. Many years later when the Israelites were conquering the Promised Land, Joshua gave Hebron to Caleb as an inheritance because the latter had “wholly followed the LORD God of Israel” (Josh. 14:14). Now Canaanites were dwelling in Hebron, so we can see that in the interim, they had multiplied, infiltrated, and occupied previously defeated territories. The Israelites had to act in order to reinstitute order

and authority in these regions.

The Canaanites represent the old man, the old nature (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22). In dedicating our life to the Lord, we commit everything to Him, but in trying to live a consecrated life, we find that the flesh can be active and dangerous. The flesh must be striven against and browbeaten, for it is still very much alive. We must fight to keep the flesh nailed to the Cross.

Generally speaking, the same thing happened in the nominal Church. The Church started out pure, but spiritual Canaanites took over, making the nominal Church the majority and the true Church the persecuted minority. Thus spiritual Canaanites can be considered from the standpoint of either the *individual* or *collective individuals*.

Judges 1:11 And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher:

Debir was defeated in the days of Joshua and Caleb, but in time, the remnant got reestablished under new leaders (Josh. 15:14-17). Now it became necessary for Judah and Simeon to go against Debir and conquer it again, doing a mopping-up operation.

Judges 1:12 And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.

Notice that verses 10-12 give both current and ancient (obsolete) names for the cities. The updated names indicate that the Book of Judges was written at a much later date, for at the time of their defeat, the cities were known by their old names. The writer would have reviewed from previous documents what had taken place, but to make the history more meaningful to the reader, he used the current names to identify the places.

Judges 1:13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife.

Othniel was the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother; that is, Othniel was Caleb's nephew. For conquering Debir, he was given Caleb's daughter Achsah in marriage. Later Othniel became Israel's first judge (Judg. 3:9).

Judges 1:14 And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou?

Judges 1:15 And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.

Caleb had already given a "south land" to Achsah, his married daughter, but now she requested additional territory, namely, "springs of water." Accordingly, Caleb gave her "the upper springs and the nether [lower] springs." We are reminded of En-gedi, where a beautiful pool is fed by a spring. A couple of hundred yards farther on, another pool is fed by a spring. Thus both an upper and a lower body of water are spring-fed. Incidentally, as a proselyte to the Jewish faith, Caleb was accepted as an Israelite.

Comment: This request was an unusual incident to record.

Reply: Probably it has a spiritual meaning, so let us consider who might symbolically possess upper and lower springs. Perhaps the two springs represent duality of nature. In one sense, the Great Company will have a dual nature in the Kingdom Age because they will go up and down

Jacob's ladder before the Son of man; that is, they will act as intermediaries, or messengers, between the spiritual and earthly phases of the Kingdom.

The Ancient Worthies will also have a dual nature, for they will be human in the Kingdom and spiritual afterwards. Their duality is shown by half the tribe of Manasseh being on each side of the Jordan River. Thus two classes—the Great Company and the Ancient Worthies—will experience duality of nature, so which class is pictured here?

Q: Could the Little Flock be the representation?

A: That would be true if we consider Joshua and Caleb as picturing two illustrations of the same class. In that case, Caleb would represent the Gentile Church, and Joshua would be the Jewish Church, that is, those Jews who accept the gospel and make their calling and election sure. However, we are more inclined to think the duality of nature pertains to the Ancient Worthies. Then this incident regarding Caleb's daughter would apply to something in the Kingdom Age.

As Christians, we draw lessons from the entering of the Israelites into the Promised Land, but that event and following incidents more fully represent the Kingdom Age. They show that mankind will have to fight weaknesses too. The instructions given to the Israelites represent our battles and fightings against spiritual Canaanites, but it is obvious that the settlement of the Holy Land in its true and fuller perspective pertains to the Kingdom Age. Many pictures in the Bible also have this slant. Thus the Israelites' entering Canaan shows that although no lion or stones will be there, mankind will have problems, nevertheless, but the problems will be greatly minimized (Isa. 35:9; 62:10).

There is another possibility too. If Joshua represents Jesus and Caleb pictures the Church, the latter will be in a position to give "springs" to the Great Company, the married daughter. As already stated, the symbolism of the dual nature seems to apply to either the Great Company or the Ancient Worthies. In the Kingdom Age, the Ancient Worthies will temporarily occupy the "south land," the Earth, the natural aspect, but in regard to the everlasting future beyond the Kingdom, Abraham "looked for a [higher] city ... whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). The Ancient Worthies were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," desiring "a better country, that is, an heavenly [country]" (Heb. 11:13,16). They yearned for a better resurrection, not just for restitution. When they come from the tomb and are perfect, they will be "better" than anyone else as far as their bodies and positions of authority are concerned, but by the end of the Millennial Age, that will no longer be true, for those of mankind who pass the test in the Little Season will have been lifted up to perfection. Therefore, to have a "better" resurrection means that ultimately they will have spirit nature.

Comment: After Achsah got a present, she was not bashful about her request for more.

Reply: The Ancient Worthies will ask for their ultimate reward, for they looked forward to their spiritual inheritance. In their leadership positions during the Kingdom Age, they will be under the Mediator, under Jesus' blood, for even though perfect, they will have to develop under the New Covenant. Then, at the end of the Millennium, they will request their change of nature.

Comment: The RSV states that Achsah urged Othniel to ask her father for the field, yet she actually made the request. According to a footnote in the NIV, verse 14 should read, "One day when she came to Othniel, he urged her to ask her father for a field." The NIV rendering makes more sense.

While, as stated, we are inclined to think that the dual nature applies to the Ancient Worthies, there is also the possibility that it pertains to the Great Company because of the daughter arrangement. Both the Church and the Great Company are considered women, and natural Israel is sometimes pictured as a daughter. We believe the incident is related to something that will happen in the Kingdom Age.

Incidentally, if we understand the Scriptures correctly, the Little Flock, who attain the divine nature, will never materialize as human beings. However, the Great Company will be able to change from spirit to human nature, for a spirit body can assume an earthly form. Moreover, nothing in Scripture indicates that the Ancient Worthies will be limited in what they can do after they get their spiritual nature. We think that only the Little Flock will be prohibited from materialization because of the great disparity in their glorious nature. In other words, it would be demeaning for those of the divine nature to appear as humans, but they will be able to communicate audibly or by a vision, which will be just as effective from a practical standpoint.

Q: The incident of Achsah was first recorded in Joshua 15:16-19, and then it was repeated almost word for word in Judges 1:12-15. What is the reason for the duplication?

A: When Ezra edited the books many years later, certain verses were added. For instance, Joshua 15:63, the end of the chapter, says, "As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day." This verse was written after the Book of Joshua was finished, for "unto this day" meant "up to that time," which was *after* the book had been compiled and written. Many centuries later Ezra edited and integrated the various accounts into a more compact form, which is the Old Testament as it exists today. Other books, such as the Psalms and 1 and 2 Samuel, also contain duplication and repetition.

A general law is that a *meaningful type* must be mentioned at least *twice* in Scripture, for out of the mouth of two or three witnesses is a matter established (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1; Matt. 18:16). Sometimes the duplication is not exactly the same, but in many places, the same statement is made twice. In other cases, the duplication is under another illustration which is such a close parallel that it can be integrated and used to teach precisely the same thing.

Judges 1:16 And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

Moses' father-in-law was Jethro, and the "city of palm trees" was Jericho (Exod. 3:1; Deut. 34:3). The "children of [Jethro] the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law" went up out of Jericho with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah. The offspring of Jethro, who gave advice to Moses, dwelled among the Israelites. It is interesting that they were honored in that respect.

Judges 1:17 And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah.

Judges 1:18 Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof.

Judges 1:19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

God was with Judah in regard to capturing the Canaanites of the mountain, but He was not

with Judah when it came to conquering the Canaanites in the valley. Judah could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron.

Judges 1:20 And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.

Judges 1:21 And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

The children of Benjamin lived near Jerusalem.

Judges 1:22 And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Beth-el: and the LORD was with them.

Judges 1:23 And the house of Joseph sent to descry Beth-el. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.)

Judges 1:24 And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Show us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will show thee mercy.

Judges 1:25 And when he showed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family.

Judges 1:26 And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day.

Verses 22-26 tell of the house of Joseph and Bethel, which were a little farther north than Jerusalem and Benjamin. Chapter 1 mentions the old names in contradistinction to the newer, more modern names. In some respects, this chapter is a review of history and events that were previously recorded in Scripture.

The man who came out from Luz and showed the Israelite spies the entrance to Luz (Bethel) so that they could enter and capture it reminds us of Rahab the harlot, who helped the two Israelites spy out the city of Jericho. In both cases, the individuals who helped the Israelites were spared.

Comment: The fact that a man came forth from Luz and, after the city was destroyed, went into the land of the Hittites and built another city, which he called Luz, is confusing.

Reply: A number of towns and cities in the Old Testament have the same name but were located in different tribes.

Judges 1:27 Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

Judges 1:28 And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.

Judges 1:29 Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

Judges 1:30 Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries.

Judges 1:31 Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob:

Judges 1:32 But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out.

Judges 1:33 Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them.

Chapter 1 is basically an account of the distribution of the tribes and the problems they had. The main lesson is that Canaanites survived in all the tribes; they were not utterly defeated. Although the Israelites had some victories, those victories were not complete.

The same is true of the spiritual counterpart, the Christian religion. The Protestants consist of numerous sects, and with Catholics, there are Greek Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Moravian Catholics, the Russian Orthodox, etc. Erroneous doctrine permeates all of the sects. Both the mother Church and the daughters are harlots, whereas spiritually speaking, the Little Flock are not defiled with “women,” that is, sects (Rev. 14:4; 17:4,5). Those of the Little Flock have a different spirit. Instead of following an organization, they follow the Lord wherever he goes. None of the churches—whether Methodist, Baptist, Anglican, or whatever—have the total deposit of truth. The Lord’s people in them have had to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). The practical lesson for the Christian is to drive out the spiritual Canaanites. In the present life, all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). This has been true in the past, it is true in the present, and it will be true in the future, right up to the end of the Gospel Age. In the past, the Lord’s people have been in both Catholic and Protestant churches; they have been sprinkled in all the denominations, yet they have been developed and have made their calling and election sure as individuals. But Catholicism and Protestantism are not specially favored; they are not approved of the Lord. Today the Lord’s people are pictured as being outside of Babylon. Christians should look for the Lord’s leadings to get fed as best they can and to make as much progress as possible.

The emphasis, or broad perspective, of the chapter is, “Neither did Manasseh [Ephraim, Zebulun, etc.] drive out the inhabitants [the Canaanites].” The details of all the town and place names are not meaningful to us now, but they will be significant in the Kingdom.

Judges 1:34 And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley:

Judges 1:35 But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries.

Judges 1:36 And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

In the final analysis, the Canaanites were not driven out of the land in any of the tribes, even though the Lord had given that express command. The suggestion with regard to the Christian is that we cannot live perfect lives no matter what effort is made. The new creature must *continually* battle with the flesh until death. However, there should be progress. Backsliding and standing still can be dangerous.

Comment: There must be “forced labor” to subdue old faults.

Reply: We serve the Lord in an earthen vessel, and that imperfect vessel needs to be covered with the robe of Christ’s righteousness. For example, Abraham’s father, Terah, accompanied him, and not until the death of Terah, who pictures the old nature, did Abraham enter the Promised Land and inherit the promise. With the Christian, when the outer man has perished, then hopefully, the new creature is very much alive and will gain the reward. Meanwhile, a dual conflict between the two natures goes on continually, but the flesh must be crucified. The dual conflict is the chief moral lesson of this first chapter.

Judges 2:1 And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

Judges 2:2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

Judges 2:3 Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

Judges 2:4 And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.

Judges 2:5 And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

Called a “messenger” in the King James margin, an “angel of the LORD” rebuked the Israelites. The “angel” may have been the Logos, who appeared to Moses at the burning bush many years earlier. However, the “angel” could also have been an unusual person, but certainly there was a startling and impressive manifestation. This incident was an abrupt intrusion into Israel’s affairs just when the nation was settling down in the land.

The message began with, “I [God] made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.” What about the last clause? It would be understood that the covenant’s never being broken was *conditional upon obedience*. The Book of Judges tells of *continual* failings by the nation of Israel, punishment, their repentance, the sending of a judge, momentary retrieval, etc. Looking back on Israel’s history, we see that the Law Covenant lasted until the First Advent and that it is still binding, even to the present time, on Jews who do not accept Christ, although few in the nation are cognizant of this fact.

The angel’s voice must have been quite strong for the people to weep as a result and to name the place Bochim, which means “the weepers.” The disobedience consisted of making a league with the inhabitants of the land and not destroying heathen altars. For example, the Israelites had made a league with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:17-27). Hence there was disobedience even in connection with previous successes, so that in the final analysis, there were only *partial* successes. The Israelites were successful in overcoming certain enemies and in occupying the land as a whole, but enemies remained; that is, the Israelites occupied pockets in the land (mostly the hills) rather than all the land in its entirety from north to south and east to west.

Accordingly, God said through the messenger, “I will not drive them [your enemies] out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.”

In other words, God would allow only *partial* success because the Israelites had not heartily and fully obeyed His command to conquer their enemies. By remaining in the land as thorns and snares, the enemies served as a test to the Israelites to see how zealous they were.

“When the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, ... the people lifted up their voice, and wept.” Not only did the “angel of the LORD,” who was probably the materialized Lord Jesus in his prehuman existence, address at least the representatives of the nation, but also he must have spoken powerfully. The people wept and “sacrificed there unto the LORD.”

Judges 2:6 And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

Judges 2:7 And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

Judges 2:8 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old.

Judges 2:9 And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

Judges 2:10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

Comment: When the eyewitnesses of the miracles in the Sinai wilderness and up to the crossing of the Jordan River and the fall of Jericho had all died, including Joshua and the elders who outlived him, disobedience set in.

Verses 6-10 seem to be a flashback prior to the time setting of verses 1-5, in which the angel came and rebuked the Israelites. Verse 7 states that the people “served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua.” Then came disobedience, for “there arose another generation after them [that is, after the elders], which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.” Notice that Joshua died at age 110.

Judges 2:11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

Judges 2:12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

Judges 2:13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

Judges 2:14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

Judges 2:15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

Comment: Here is an example of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Each generation needs its experience with sin, for regardless of the instruction and warnings, fallen man goes deep into sin. Even if there is repentance, the tendency is to revert to sinful ways.

Reply: Only a minority of Israelites were faithful in this period of time and did not worship other gods. Eventually God allowed the nation to be sold into the hand of enemies as slaves, and they were made to pay tribute. Then God would deal favorably with the next generation of Israelites. Sometimes quite a few years were involved before one generation died off, and another came on the scene.

The Book of Judges seems to have been edited at a much later date, for editorial comments are inserted from time to time in the recording of history, and that is true here in the beginning chapters, which contain generalities and moral lessons for the 450-year period. Later we will get into the actual account of individuals who were raised up, and years will be given that are helpful in mathematically calculating the chronology. Throughout the Period of the Judges, “the children of Israel ... forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods.” They “bowed themselves” unto the false gods “and provoked the LORD to anger.” God was merciful in that He did not completely forsake them as a people or allow them to be extinguished. However, we think that the *individuals* who bowed to other gods were another matter. God chastised the Israelites and then forgave them as a whole by raising up a judge in time, but He did not necessarily forgive the individuals who committed gross transgressions. Two deities are particularly mentioned: the god Baal and the goddess Ashtaroth.

Judges 2:16 Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

Judges 2:17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a-whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so.

Judges 2:18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

Judges 2:19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

Obviously, these verses are an editorial comment that was inserted by a later hand, and the Lord’s providence permitted them to be included as a part of His Word. For example, notice that the statement “Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges” is expressed in past tense, and the account has not even told of the first judge yet. Therefore, these early chapters summarize the weaknesses of the nation. How many times God was patient and merciful to the Israelites in sparing them! In studying the entire 450-year Period of the Judges, we can see that one generation after another was tried and disobeyed. As a people, the Israelites did not stand in harmony with the Lord.

Judges were periodically raised up. “And when the LORD raised ... up judges, then the LORD ... delivered them [the Israelites] out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge.” The handpicked judges were strong and unusual characters, for while they served, the Israelites more or less obeyed. Following the death of a judge, there came another testing period.

Comment: The most overpowering sin was the worship of other gods, and each time the nation returned to disobedience, the sins seemed to get worse.

Reply: Yes, because they began to worship more than just the two gods Baal and Ashtaroth. Verse 19 describes the deteriorating condition: “And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they [the Israelites] returned, and corrupted themselves *more than their fathers*, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.”

Comment: In the Pastor’s writings, the thought is expressed that the judge was to execute justice and relieve the oppressed. Based on principles elsewhere in Scripture pertaining to Israel’s history, when the people deserved punishment, God allowed an enemy to conquer and oppress them (for example, Nebuchadnezzar). But when the enemy went too far and did more than was necessary to balance the scales of justice, the people cried out. Then God executed justice from the other standpoint, and the enemy was punished.

Reply: Those who oppressed Israel were, in turn, oppressed in their own defeat; that is, they were overcome and slain.

When a judge was raised up, there was a short period of time in which he had to break the yoke that was over the people. Then there was relative peace during the subsequent life of that judge, as indicated by statements such as “the land had rest” (Judg. 3:11,30; 5:31). But after the judge died, the Israelites “turned *quickly* out of the way which their fathers walked in.”

“It repented [sorrowed] the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.” God heard the “groanings” of the Israelites (much as He did when they were in Egypt). In other words, God has *feelings*. It sorrowed Him to hear the people’s groanings, but the sufferings were necessary.

Judges 2:20 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;

Judges 2:21 I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died:

Judges 2:22 That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.

Judges 2:23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

Verses 20-23 explain some of the principles God had in mind when the Israelites entered the Promised Land. He had promised that every foot they put down in the enemy’s territory was theirs. “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses” (Josh. 1:3). However, there were many spots in the land where the Israelites did not drive out the enemy.

Judges 3:1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

Judges 3:2 Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

Judges 3:3 Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath.

Judges 3:4 And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

Judges 3:5 And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:

Comment: The Israelites were forced to learn warfare because enemies remained there: five Philistine lords, Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Jebusites, Perizzites, and Sidonians. The spiritual lesson is that when we accept Jesus, that is not the end, for we must *fight* the good fight of faith.

Reply: Satan is still the god of this world, and we still have Canaanites in the flesh. We are to be faithful unto death in warring against the world, the flesh, and the devil (Rev. 2:10).

The listed enemies were sort of a historical reference, for in warring against them, the Israelites would recall that a previous generation had driven them out of certain areas but not completely out of the land. The current generation of Israelites would appreciate what had formerly been done, but they would also realize that the enemy had not been utterly defeated because of the faithlessness of the preceding generation.

Comment: Just as the Israelites kept having to fight against enemies their forebears had only partially driven out, so Christians must keep fighting some of the same spiritual enemies all their life.

“They [the enemies] were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD” and love Him with all their heart (see RSV). The Israelites were tested, or proved, by the enemies being left in the land.

Judges 3:6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

Judges 3:7 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

The sins of the Israelites were intermarriage with the heathen peoples and worshipping their gods. The Canaanites, Hivites, Amorites, etc., became a snare.

Judges 3:8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years.

Because of disobedience and neglect, the Israelites were sold into servitude to the king of Mesopotamia for a period of eight years.

Q: Have archaeologists unearthed any evidence to verify this history with Mesopotamia?

A: Artifacts, pottery, etc., have been found, but the archaeologists do not know what time slot

to put them in. Today's Bible archaeologists are way off on their chronology, so the time periods they assign to a certain civilization and their deductions are very shaky. They are more accurate with Egypt and Babylon than with places like Mesopotamia. Another problem is that the archaeologists are from different countries, so even if they find cuneiform writing and interpret it accurately from, say, a German standpoint, it would not be recognizable from a Hebrew standpoint. However, when we accept the Bible as the Lord's Word, there is a connection, for then we know how many years the Israelites were oppressed and how many years they had rest in the continuing cycles. The time periods are handed to us on a silver platter. Even though the platter is rather complicated, the chronology is laid out, and the Apostle Paul simplified the Period of the Judges by saying it was 450 years.

Judges 3:9 And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

Judges 3:10 And the spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim.

Judges 3:11 And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

An eight-year servitude was followed by 40 years of rest under the leadership of Othniel, the first judge, who delivered the Israelites from the king of Mesopotamia.

Comment: Not only was Caleb a proselyte to the Jewish faith after giving a favorable report with Joshua in spying out the land, but the Lord later honored him and gave him property in Israel. Faith followed this family of proselytes, so it was appropriate that Othniel, Caleb's nephew, was the first judge.

Reply: Yes, the "spirit of the LORD" came upon Othniel; that is, God appointed him as a judge. All of the judges were unusual characters, but we know very little about most of them, for the scriptural accounts are generally brief.

Comment: For "deliverer," the King James margin has "saviour." Also, according to Young's *Analytical Concordance*, the name Othniel means "God is force."

Judges 3:12 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

Judges 3:13 And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.

Judges 3:14 So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

Judges 3:15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

Very quickly after Othniel died, the Israelites again did evil. Therefore, the Lord had Eglon, the king of Moab, conquer Israel for 18 years. The Ammonites and Amalek assisted Moab in smiting Israel and possessing Jericho, the "city of palm trees." This period of Israel's servitude was more than twice as long as the first period.

For the Israelites to cry unto Jehovah meant they were beseeching Him for deliverance. In other words, they humbled themselves and asked for forgiveness and deliverance.

The judge this time was Ehud, a left-handed Benjamite. Incidentally, many of the Benjamites were left-handed, and they were skilled in using slingshots. The Israelites sent Ehud with a present, or tribute, to King Eglon of Moab, but subterfuge was involved, as we will see.

Judges 3:16 But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

Judges 3:17 And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man.

Judges 3:18 And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

Judges 3:19 But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

Judges 3:20 And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat.

Ehud's left-handedness was handy for the strategy he had in mind, for a dagger, or sword, was concealed under his raiment on his right thigh. The sword was two-edged and 18 inches long. Of course Eglon, the king of Moab, never dreamed that Ehud was left-handed.

After Ehud presented the tribute to Eglon, he sent away the Israelites who had carried it. (Part of Ehud's strategy was to get the king off guard.) Now Ehud was alone, but attendants (or guards) were still around the king, so Ehud turned back and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king" (RSV). Then the king commanded, "Quiet!" and all his attendants left him (NIV). Now Ehud and Eglon were alone.

Ehud approached while the king "was sitting alone in the upper room of his summer palace" (NIV). What a convenient setting for Ehud to have a private audience with the king! Ehud said (and probably quite forcefully), "I have a message *from God* for you" (NIV). Becoming suspicious, the king, "a very fat man," arose out of his seat.

Judges 3:21 And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

Judges 3:22 And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

Judges 3:23 Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them.

Judges 3:24 When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

Judges 3:25 And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth.

Next Ehud drew out the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into the king's belly. Ehud acted with such strength that both the blade and the shaft, or handle, sank into the fat. "And the dirt [excrement] came out" when the blade was pushed through Eglon's belly, cutting the intestines. Ehud escaped through the porch by shutting the doors and locking them.

Ehud's being left-handed caught the king unprepared, for if the blow had come from the right hand, the king might have parried it, or at least have fought and caused enough noise to alert his guards. With his left hand, Ehud drew out the sword from his right thigh. Since this movement was rather awkward, Ehud must have done a little acting. For example, he may have had a visible external sword as a "fake" so that he could deceptively grab the one on his right thigh with his left hand. Meanwhile, the guards were probably just outside in the hallway—they would have remained nearby—but they heard nothing suspicious.

Comment: Of course God would have helped Ehud with this strategy by giving him the idea.

Reply: Ehud was purposely chosen from the tribe of Benjamin because he was left-handed. We are reminded of the deception Joab used to kill Amasa (2 Sam. 20:8-10).

Judges 3:26 And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath.

Judges 3:27 And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them.

Judges 3:28 And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

Judges 3:29 And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man.

Judges 3:30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Ehud had slain only one individual, yet he accomplished his mission. He then went up to Mount Ephraim and blew the trumpet, rallying the Israelites to fight and telling them that God had delivered the Moabites into their hand. Now was the time to attack, when the enemy was thoroughly disconcerted to find their king dead. The Moabites were mighty men of valor, but they would wonder who was in charge. Psychologically they were at a low ebb, and in their confusion, the Israelites attacked.

The Israelites followed Ehud down to the fords of the Jordan River. Jericho, on the west side of the Jordan, had been captured by the Moabites, who were now cut off and could not escape, for the Israelites did not allow any of them to cross the river and go back to their homeland.

The 10,000 Moabites who were slain are described as "lusty ... men of valour," that is, "strong, able-bodied men" (RSV). Since the king had been with them in Jericho, we can be sure they were handpicked for their courage and valor. With their defeat, the land had rest for 80 years.

Judges 3:31 And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

The next judge was Shamgar, who killed 600 Philistines with an “ox goad,” which was a yoke attachment for plowing with oxen. The goad was used like a bludgeon. Shamgar probably judged for part of the long 80-year period that is attributed to Ehud. During a “rest” period, there could still be warfare, but the warfare did not amount to anything, for the Israelites were not conquered. Thus Shamgar nipped the Philistine problem in the bud by killing 600 of them during this period of rest.

The sequence of judges during the 450-year Period of the Judges was as follows: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson.

Judges 4:1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

Judges 4:2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

Judges 4:3 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

The Jabin servitude, which followed 80 years of rest, lasted for 20 years. Jabin was the king of Canaan, and Sisera was the captain of the host. The 900 iron chariots of the Canaanites were used in the valleys and plains of northern Israel.

Q: Verse 1 tells that the Israelites “again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.” Is the thought that Ehud lived for the whole time, but Shamgar did the judging when Ehud was too old to function effectively as a judge?

A: Yes. With no time period being given for Shamgar, the implication is that both he and Ehud served during the 80 years of rest for the land.

Judges 4:4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

Judges 4:5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Judges 4:6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

Judges 4:7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

Deborah, a *woman*, now judged Israel. For a female to serve under the circumstances of that day meant that no capable male was available. She sat under a palm tree, and people *voluntarily* came to her for advice. Thus Deborah acted in the capacity of a judge and a prophetess. The suggestion is that the Israelites went out of their way to seek advice from Deborah under the palm tree (as opposed to judges who conveniently sat in the gate even during this period).

How did this unusual arrangement come about? Deborah's being a prophetess may have tipped the scale so that the Israelites noticed not only that she was wise but also that God was speaking through her. Evidently, time was a factor in the people's recognition that her wisdom was true. The account does not provide background information, but some practical incidents must have occurred that manifested her wisdom and spirit. She showed humility in wanting to speak through Barak, a male. (To the contrary, a woman like Jezebel relished the idea of leadership and brooked no interference.) Evidently, Deborah wanted to judge in the proper manner.

Mount Ephraim was in northern Israel. God instructed Deborah to call Barak and say, "Take 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, and go to Mount Tabor." Thus she exercised her role as prophetess; that is, Barak was the front man, and she was honored as the prophetess. Of course her personal character must have been unusual. The 10,000 handpicked men to be under Barak's direction were selected from his own tribe, "Kedesh-*naphtali*," and from the tribe of Zebulun, which bordered Naphtali.

God said He would "draw" Sisera and his 900 chariots and "multitude" of men to the river Kishon and give Israel the victory. In other words, when Barak and his 10,000 men went to Mount Tabor, a position of strategic importance, King Jabin, the oppressor of the land, would see this gathering as a danger signal and would respond by going there too in an effort to stop the threat. After 20 years of servitude, the Israelites were comforted to hear God's message, "I will deliver him into thine hand."

Judges 4:8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

Judges 4:9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

Judges 4:10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

Judges 4:11 Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.

Judges 4:12 And they showed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

Judges 4:13 And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

Judges 4:14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

Judges 4:15 And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

Judges 4:16 But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the

Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left.

Judges 4:17 Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

When Barak told Deborah he would not go to Mount Tabor unless she agreed to accompany him, she rebuked him by prophesying that the honor of the victory would go to a woman (who would prove to be Jael). Barak's stipulation that Deborah go with him indicated an insufficiency of faith on his part. Perhaps 10,000 men did not seem like a large enough number to confront and defeat the army of Jabin, but nevertheless, Barak should have trusted in the Lord. Because of his reluctance to go alone and await further instruction, Deborah prophesied that more credit for the defeat would be given to a woman than to him. In other words, the slaying of Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, would be considered more of a victory than the combat itself.

Comment: With 900 iron chariots, the enemy host could easily have overwhelmed the Israelites without the Lord's help.

Comment: The song of Deborah and Barak in the next chapter tells that the river Kishon swept the enemy away. "The torrent Kishon swept them away, the onrushing torrent, the torrent Kishon" (Judg. 5:21 RSV). *Reprint* article No. 5604 suggests that God caused rains to swell the river and overflow its banks so that the chariots became mired in the mud. "A great storm and cloudburst swelled the river, making quagmires of the lower valleys, rendering useless the chariots of Sisera. His soldiers, fleeing for their lives, were cut down by the Israelites, while other thousands were swept by the freshets down the river to the sea."

"The LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, ... and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left." The only survivor was Sisera, who, as captain of the host, was the most important personage. He abandoned his chariot and fled on foot when he saw that the tide was turning and that utter defeat was imminent. Of course the captain's chariot would be far more recognizable than the ordinary chariots, so Sisera's fleeing attracted attention. But why did he go to the tent of Jael for refuge? Jael was the wife of Heber, and "there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor [a well-known mountain fortress] and the house of Heber the Kenite." Therefore, Sisera felt that he would have asylum in that particular tent and that he was in a safe territory with someone in alliance with Jabin.

Comment: The account calls Hobab "the father-in-law of Moses." Young's *Analytical Concordance* says Hobab was either Moses' father-in-law or the son of Moses' father-in-law.

Reply: Numbers 10:29 states that Hobab was the son of Raguel, which was another name for Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. Therefore, Hobab was the son of Moses' father-in-law.

Judges 4:18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

Judges 4:19 And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

Judges 4:20 Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

Judges 4:21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

How interesting that Jael went out to meet Sisera and invited him into the tent! She obviously knew in advance what she would do. Perhaps she had been at a vantage point where she saw how the battle was going and thus knew that he was fleeing to her for refuge. When Sisera was in the tent, she gave him milk to drink instead of water and covered him with a mantle. (Milk is sometimes conducive to sleep, especially if it is warm.) While Sisera was asleep, she took a long tent peg and, with a hammer, drove it through his temples, fastening his head to the ground.

The weight of the tent skins would have necessitated a long peg, for to pull anything taut that was heavy and durable required withstanding tremendous pressure. Therefore, the wooden or metal peg had to go quite a ways into the ground in order to hold the tent.

God may have prepared for Jael's act by making sure a loose tent peg was lying on the ground nearby. At any rate, the ferocity and power with which Jael drove the peg through Sisera's head were remarkable. She must have been full of zeal and righteous indignation to kill him while he was sleeping. Of course the Lord would have guided and strengthened her arm to aim the peg and then smash it all the way through his temples so that it stuck in the ground. Incidentally, in a tornado, a straw has been known to go through a tree with a diameter of six or 12 inches. It seems almost impossible for something so fragile to penetrate a hard tree, but that has happened. Therefore, if the tent peg was hammered straight enough with a little extra oomph—and especially with the help of the Lord's Spirit—such a mighty deed could be done.

Comment: It could be said, with tongue in cheek, that Jael killed Sisera with kindness.

Comment: Since Israel's literal enemies represent the foes of the new creature, Jael's strength and determination to kill Sisera represent the Christian's hatred of iniquity (Heb. 1:9).

Reply: The method of killing Sisera was savage and brutal, yet the Lord approved it for that past age. Hence there has to be a lesson for the new creature, as stated.

Judges 4:22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

Judges 4:23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

Judges 4:24 And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

As Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him. She directed Barak to her tent, and there he saw Sisera lying dead with a tent peg in his temples. "So *God* subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel." The victory of the Israelites was so devastating that the power of the Canaanite force was nullified. Thus was fulfilled Deborah's prediction that credit for the victory would go more to a woman than to Barak. We believe that "woman" was Jael rather than Deborah herself (verse 9).

Q: Why is Barak listed in Hebrews 11:32 as one of the Ancient Worthies since the greater credit for this battle went to Jael?

A: Initially, Barak needed Deborah to accompany him in going to fight Jabin's army, but he evidently grew stronger after that experience.

Comment: Barak's experience with Deborah and seeing Sisera defeated in such an unusual way at the hand of Jael apparently increased his faith and zeal for the rest of his life.

Reply: Yes. The events that happened were a lesson he rightly received.

Judges 5:1 Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,

Judges 5:2 Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.

Verse 2 begins the song of Deborah. She and Barak sang together of victories, past and present. Deborah must have had a beautiful and powerful voice as she sang with Barak under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Judges 5:3 Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.

Judges 5:4 LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water.

An earthquake and a rainstorm took place when God went "out of Seir" and marched "out of the field of Edom." This earthquake, as well as the one in verse 5, showed God's *power and majesty* in connection with judgment. Mount Seir is near Petra and thus pertains to Edom. The earthquake of verse 4 occurred when the Israelites wanted to take the shortcut high-ridge road north to Jericho but instead were forced to go down into the desert and take a much longer circuitous route and suffer the inconvenience of the desert heat. Because they were denied permission to go through Edom, the Lord brought judgment against that land; that is, He was angry at the Edomites' refusal to grant passage to the Israelites and caused an earthquake.

In addition, "the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water." To have a flood in a dry desert would seem to be impossible, but it was a great victory for the Israelites.

Judges 5:5 The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

In calling attention to the earthquake that took place at Mount Sinai when God gave Israel the Law, Deborah and Barak sang, "The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel." The Exodus account tells what happened on the third day when God appeared: "And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly" (Exod. 19:18).

Over the years, many people who traveled to Sinai have wondered if Musa was the true Mount Sinai. Of the five mountains that could potentially be the true Mount Sinai, two of them were easily eliminated. Of the remaining three, Musa seemed to us to be the actual site of the giving of the Law. All of the details fit, but the one obstacle reported by travelers was the lack of evidence of an earthquake having occurred on Mount Sinai. On one of the tours to that area, we explored a little on our own, trying to get to the actual place where Moses had read the Law. However, we followed a blind lead that ended with a chasm we could not cross to get to

the correct spur. With the tour group waiting, we did not have time to backtrack and go around. Feeling very discouraged, we turned around and looked back at that branch of the mountain where we had encountered the blind lead, *and there was the molten rock*—all black so that the granite looked like marble. There was the evidence we had longed to find. The molten lava had drained down over the rock, having come down like rivulets.

Comment: The King James marginal reference says the Hebrew for “melted” is “flowed,” which supports the description just given.

The Mount Sinai experience took place at the beginning of the 40 years in the wilderness, and the Mount Seir experience occurred at the end of that time period.

Judges 5:6 In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.

Judges 5:7 The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.

Judges 5:8 They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

Judges 5:9 My heart is the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD.

Judges 5:10 Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

Judges 5:11 They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.

Previously, in the days of Shamgar and Jael, the Israelites could not trust highway travel but had to take more circuitous routes to get to their destinations. “The highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.”

Deborah called herself “a mother in Israel.” The Lord’s methods are unusual, so one cannot get too confident in set ways, for something extraordinary might happen in connection with change. For example, with the coming of the gospel, which was so different from the Law, many Jews had difficulty making the switch because they were so accustomed to having the Lord do things in a certain way. It is one thing for a person to act presumptuously and incur the Lord’s wrath by usurping power, but it is another thing when something happens through an abundant set of circumstances that we had nothing to do with. Down through history, there has been a lot of conniving where women got into power through subterfuge and other means, but through a series of unpremeditated providential circumstances, a woman may find herself in an unusual position. In other words, we should not get too set in our ways, for God can providentially arrange to have someone elevated to “power”—even a *woman*—without a usurpation of power. We should learn the Lord’s method and manner, but an exception is always a possibility. Although Revelation 2:20 states, “Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols,” many things happened during Jezebel’s life that indicated her character and background, and she was not a true Israelite in the first place. The circumstance with Deborah was entirely different.

Q: Is the thought that a woman’s exaltation in an unusual circumstance could be according to,

and in harmony with, the Lord's will?

A: Yes, in a special circumstance. Notice that Deborah praised the *male* judges of Israel, who rode on white asses. (We will find out later that there were 70 judges in Israel at one time.) In humility before the Lord, Deborah gave credit where she could. Her spirit was very commendable, and apparently, the Israelites recognized that fact back there.

Comment: The same *Reprint* article No. 5604 makes a point of comparing Mount Tabor and the valley where the battle took place to the future conflict at the end of the age.

Reply: The valley of Jezreel is a fertile and extensive plain in the Mount Tabor area. Nearby is the city of Nazareth.

Q: Where is Megiddo?

A: Megiddo is on that same plain but as it turns to the north and wends its way toward the Mediterranean Sea. Thus the plain of Jezreel turns into the plain of Megiddo. Megiddo, which is like an extension of Jezreel, is closer to Carmel and the seacoast, whereas Jezreel (near Mount Tabor) is in the heartland of Israel. The two are connected.

Judges 5:12 Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

Judges 5:13 Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.

Judges 5:14 Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer.

Judges 5:15 And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.

Judges 5:16 Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.

Judges 5:17 Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches.

Judges 5:18 Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

Verses 12-18 are historic. Today we do not understand all the innuendos that are involved in this song, but the Israelites of Deborah's day would have been very familiar with her references and the local information. She was doing the narrating, even though her own name was brought into the song.

“Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive.... Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.” Deborah praised Barak and rejoiced over how God had dealt with Israel and was blessing her and Barak. She was effervescent in her love and praise for God and for how He had helped His humble people become a potent

factor in the land.

Comment: Deborah seemed to be giving a mixture of praise and rebuke for the tribes depending on whether or not they joined in the battle with the 10,000 selected from Zebulun and Naphtali. For example, Dan remained in ships, and Reuben stayed among the flocks of sheep. The Revised Standard Version is clearer. Reuben, Gilead (Gad), Dan, and Asher reneged, whereas Ephraim, Benjamin, and Issachar were praised for helping. The Revised Standard reads as follows:

“Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song! Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

“Then down marched the remnant of the noble; the people of the LORD marched down for him against the mighty.

“From Ephraim they set out thither into the valley, following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen; from Machir marched down the commanders, and from Zebulun those who bear the marshal’s staff;

“The princes of Issachar came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed forth at his [the enemy’s] heels. Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.

“Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds, to hear the piping for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.

“Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why did he abide with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, settling down by his landings.

“Zebulun is a people that jeopardized their lives to the death; Naphtali too, on the heights of the field.”

After the victory against the Canaanites and this song, we can be sure that the tribes who were mentioned unfavorably felt shame for their sleepiness in responding to this historic crisis in Israel. The battle was critical.

Judges 5:19 The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money.

The valley of Megiddo, going northward toward the Mediterranean Sea, was also involved in Barak’s battle.

Judges 5:20 They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

“They” and “the stars in their courses” are a reference to the holy angels. Of course the highest praise for the victory was attributed to God (Judg. 4:23).

Judges 5:21 The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.

The river Kishon flooded, sweeping away the enemy and causing the chariots to get mired in the mud. The RSV has “the onrushing torrent” instead of “that ancient river.” With the fleeing enemy being caught by the flood waters, not a soul survived except Sisera, whom Jael killed a

little later.

In the actual battle at Mount Tabor, the Israelites may have rushed down the slopes, causing the enemy to flee in disarray by way of Megiddo to the northwest. Then God intervened with the flooded river to make sure all died except Sisera. The battle was quite a rout. Evidently, Mount Carmel was the source of the river Kishon, which flowed southeast.

Judges 5:22 Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.

The RSV reads, “Then loud beat the horses’ hoofs with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.” The enemy steeds fled with the chariots, and the Israelites pursued quite a distance from Mount Tabor. By piecing clues together, we realize the battle was *much bigger* than might at first be assumed. Even the holy angels were involved, causing nature to assist the Israelites with a flood.

The symbolic lesson is as follows. The battle began in Jezreel and climaxed in Megiddo with a startling deliverance. The end-of-the-age trouble will start with the battle of Armageddon on Christendom and climax in Israel with a startling deliverance.

Judges 5:23 Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

The Israelite town of Meroz was probably in the northeastern sector of the nation, in the direction of Sisera’s flight. Earlier in the song, there were blessings and cursings depending on the responses of the tribes to the battle cry of Deborah and Barak. She praised those who cooperated in the endeavor to be free from the slavery and bondage of the Canaanites and criticized those who did not help in the utter defeat. Probably the fleeing Sisera went right through Meroz, but the inhabitants missed the golden opportunity to apprehend him. By being lethargic, they did not enter into the spirit of this momentous occasion and let him slip through their hands. Thus it took Jael, a *woman*, to accomplish Sisera’s slaying.

Judges 5:24 Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

Comment: “Blessed above women shall Jael ... be” sounds like the words spoken to Mary by the angel and Elisabeth in the Magnificat (Luke 1:28,42). The Catholics put great emphasis on what was said to Mary (“Blessed art thou among women”), but here is another woman who acted in harmony with the Lord’s will and was given the *same* commendation.

Reply: Yes, the language was somewhat similar.

Judges 5:25 He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

Judges 5:26 She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen’s hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

Jael did two things: (1) she drove the “nail,” or tent peg, through Sisera’s temples, and (2) she crushed his head. As a heroine, she acted courageously.

Judges 5:27 At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

The repetition and cadence sound like a chorus and indicate the song was adapted for use on other occasions. Similarly, our national anthem is sung on various occasions where a patriotic spirit is desirable.

Judges 5:28 The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?

Judges 5:29 Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself,

Judges 5:30 Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?

As Sisera's mother looked through the lattice of the window to see if he was coming in the distance, she wondered why her son was not returning from battle. She inquired anxiously of her lady servants as to the reason for the delay. They answered her, "Yea"; that is, they reiterated her anxiety. Then Sisera's mother asked, speaking to herself, "Have they not divided the prey?" In other words, "Could the delay be due to taking a spoil?" In the Hebrew language, the phrasing probably fit the music and the rhyme. In warfare in those days, it was customary for the victors to take trinkets back to their families. Here needlework, such as embroidery, was suggested as a possible spoil. Men put such booty around their necks or tucked the spoil into their clothing for transport back home.

Again the repetition suggests that Deborah phrased this poem, or ode, in a way that could be sung in a chorus form. The influence of the Holy Spirit similarly adapted some of David's Psalms for responsive singing between two or more parties—or between a soloist and the audience. That may be the case here, for verse 28 is an abrupt change. Verse 27 finished with thoughts about Jael, and then suddenly the scene changed to Sisera's mother, who wondered what was taking her son so long.

Judges 5:31 So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

The song of Deborah and Barak ended with the words: "So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." These concluding thoughts were adapted for a group response or for participation through the repeated singing of the song in the future. Sisera's mother expected her son to return victoriously with others and the spoils of war, but he had been killed. Since his death did not have to be explained, the song ended with Deborah's speaking on behalf of Israel: "So let all *thine enemies* perish, O LORD." The song concluded with a summation, with an obvious rhetorical answer that did not need explaining.

A historical note was then added to the account: "And the land had rest forty years." The 40 years of rest were attributed to Deborah's judgeship. Therefore, a chronology table would show that the land of Israel had rest during the period of Deborah and Barak.

Comment: In the Psalms, David often expressed the sentiment "Let all thine enemies perish, O LORD." We, too, should want God's enemies—those who prove incorrigible—to perish.

Reply: Yes. In this case, an outside force had come against Israel to try to displace the people

from the land God had deeded to them.

Judges 6:1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

While the land had rest under Deborah for 40 years, that rest was contingent upon the Israelites' obedience. When they began to deflect and to wander from the old paths, the Lord allowed the enemy to be successful in harmony with the principles laid down in the Book of Deuteronomy. Thus, because of the evil that was done, the Israelites were delivered into the hand of the Midianites for seven years.

Judges 6:2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

Judges 6:3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

Judges 6:4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

Judges 6:5 For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.

Judges 6:6 And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

In addition to the Midianites, the Israelites were delivered into the hand of the Amalekites, who were very fierce. The Midianites and the Amalekites came as a joint force from the east; that is, these enemies came into Israel from what is called Transjordan today. In fact, "they came as grasshoppers for multitude [in great numbers]; for both they and their camels were without number." They and their animals foraged off the land of Israel, eating the crops and destroying the land. The Israelites, who were far less in number, could not stop the invading host. Thus "Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites."

"Because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds." Many Israelites forsook their homes, their normal dwellings, lest the Midianites not only forage the crops but also enter into their households and take all their goods and any storage of grain. Hence the Israelites hid in caves and excavated holes, or dens, in the mountainsides for shelter, and they took with them what little they could keep hidden from the enemy. What a pitiful condition the people were in at that time with their makeshift shelters!

Comment: After only seven years of oppression, the Israelites cried to the Lord for deliverance. The shortness of the time indicates the extremity of the oppression.

Comment: Probably many artifacts are still hidden in those caves.

Reply: That would be especially true down near En-gedi and Qumran, where the hills contain many caves. If a family had a home in a cave with only a tiny path leading to it, they could go back and forth, but if an enemy came, they would be in a good position to defend themselves. No doubt if all the caves were explored, the searchers would find a number of artifacts. The

Dead Sea scrolls were discovered on the eastern side of the Judean hill range, but there are also caves on the western side.

Judges 6:7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,

Judges 6:8 That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

Judges 6:9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;

Judges 6:10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

God sent a prophet to the Israelites when they cried for deliverance from the Midianites. The prophet reminded them how God had delivered them from Egypt, yet they disobeyed.

The Amorites are mentioned in verse 10. Years earlier a statement was made that the Israelites could not enter the Promised Land until the iniquity of the Amorites had come to the full (Gen. 15:16). In time, the iniquity did come to the full, and the Israelites entered the land. However, they did not fully conquer the Amorites, for some remained after their “defeat.” Now these enemies had risen up again to cause problems for the Israelites.

Judges 6:11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

Judges 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

An angel came and sat under an oak tree on the property of Joash, Gideon’s father. Meanwhile, Gideon was secretly threshing a small amount of wheat behind the winepress, trying to hide it from the Midianites, who were spread all around in the land. If they saw threshing activity, they seized the grain as booty. The angel brought a message to Gideon *personally*, whereas previously a prophet had brought a lesson to the *Israelites*. He said, “The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.”

The angel called Gideon a “mighty man of valour.” There is no recorded history of Gideon’s background to merit this commendation, but the description, plus the approval in Hebrews 11:32, counteracts any wrong accusations of cowardice in regard to the fleece signs, etc. At this point, Gideon did not know that an angel was addressing him. He was quietly threshing and hiding wheat when this incident *suddenly* occurred. Not being given to flattery, Gideon was probably startled by the angel’s complimentary comment, but it establishes Gideon’s character.

Judges 6:13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

From a natural standpoint, Gideon was trying to reason on what the prophet had said earlier about Jehovah’s bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. Before they entered the Promised Land,

God had told them in effect, “Do not fear the gods of the Amorites. Place your confidence in me. Didn’t I deliver you from Egypt?” But the Israelites had not hearkened. When this surprise encounter occurred, Gideon said to the angel under the oak, “Yes, it is true what happened in the past, but what about our present situation? We are helpless. Look what we have to do just to survive. The only conclusion is that God has forsaken us, so how can you say He is with us?” The point is that Gideon was prudent. He was simply trying to reason things out, and that is a sensible thing to do. Many people are brash in what they consider bravery, and they foolishly expend their lives, whereas with a little wisdom, they would accomplish a great deal more. Recklessness is not bravery.

Comment: Gideon had a good character. He just needed to be buoyed up.

Reply: Yes. In other words, if we are thinking about joining a cause—even to be a Christian—we should want to know as many facts as possible. Otherwise, we would have nothing to work on. Therefore, Christians, as well as the Ancient Worthies in the past, logically want a reason for their faith. Gideon was willing to die for a *worthwhile* cause that could portend victory, but he had to be assured that was the case. The angel was telling Gideon, “God knows your character. You are made of the material to be a judge, even though you lack the confidence.”

Judges 6:14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

Gideon was addressed by “the LORD,” that is, by the angel (probably the Logos) who was a *representative* of God. It was as if the angel had come from the headquarters of Jehovah’s presence to speak to Gideon in God’s name. As stated in the RSV, the message was, “Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” The message was almost like an encouragement, yet it was a tender rebuke, as if to say, “Let us not have any more words. I have called you a mighty man of valor. Go in that strength, and do what I tell you. You will be victorious.”

This was a short conversation from an angel sitting under an oak and talking to Gideon, who was secretly threshing wheat in little sheaves behind the winepress, trying to separate the grain from the kernel. It would have been interesting to witness this event.

Normally, the sheaves of wheat were laid out on a plain, and a sled pulled by oxen was driven over them. The weight of the sled crushed the grain. This method was “mass production” compared to the piecemeal fashion Gideon was forced to use in secret.

Judges 6:15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.

In humility, Gideon said to the angel, “Oh my Lord, wherewith shall *I* save Israel? behold, my family is *poor* in Manasseh, and I am the *least* in my father’s house.” We are reminded of Moses, who, when told to go before Pharaoh, also felt unworthy.

Judges 6:16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

What a strong statement, especially when Gideon did not have confidence in himself! However, he did not lack courage, as will be seen later. God said to Gideon, “Surely I will be with you, and you will smite the Midianites *as one man*.” The Midianites were *numerous*—like grasshoppers in the land for number—so this assurance of victory was important. Gideon would deal them such a *singular* blow that all the grasshoppers would be eliminated. A

grasshopper plague is fearsomely destructive because of the numbers. People try all kinds of methods—digging ditches, setting fires, etc.—but the insects inundate the land anyway.

Judges 6:17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me.

Judges 6:18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

Judges 6:19 And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.

Notice Gideon's hospitality. As the angel talked to him for a while, Gideon would have started to wonder, "Is he an angel or not?" But he also would have thought, "Why me? I am poor and of Manasseh, and even in my own family, I am esteemed the least." Before the conversation went any further, Gideon asked the individual to give him a sign and to tarry for a meal.

Gideon had been threshing wheat in secret. Now he killed and prepared a kid and made unleavened cakes—all of which took time while the angel waited. As Gideon bustled around, no doubt he looked up from time to time to make sure the angel was still there. When Gideon was ready, he brought out the prepared meal and presented it to the angel under the oak. This sense of hospitality is expressed in Hebrews 13:2, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." The thought, even in our day under very unusual circumstances, is that the "stranger" can be an angel, whether or not we know it.

Judges 6:20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

The angel instructed Gideon, "Lay the meat and the cakes on the rock, and pour the broth on them." (Evidently, a boulder was nearby with a flat top that was like a table.) The angel's remarks had been so strange and yet so favorable that Gideon obeyed, even though the act seemed to be a waste. Certainly he did not know that fire would come out of the rock and consume the meat and the cakes.

Judges 6:21 Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

When the angel put forth the end of his staff and touched the meat and the cakes, fire rose up out of the rock and consumed them. Then the angel disappeared in the fire. We are reminded of Manoah, Samson's father, who saw an angel ascend out of sight in the flame of the fire (Judg. 13:19,20).

Judges 6:22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

Now Gideon was convinced that the individual was a messenger, an angel of God. He was shocked, and perhaps he also felt bad, thinking he should not have uttered certain remarks. He realized that he had been tested.

Comment: The brethren might entertain "angels" unawares in the sense that individuals are

sent to help them in a particular situation.

Reply: God uses both animate and inanimate objects for that purpose. In some cases, Paul addressed elders as “angels,” but he probably did this in connection with *true* elders of the Church, that is, with those who were elders in *God’s* estimation (2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Tim. 5:21).

Judges 6:23 And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.

The same angel reappeared and said to Gideon, “Peace be unto you; fear not: you will not die.”

Judges 6:24 Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.

Smitten with humility, Gideon built an altar and gave it the name Jehovah-shalom (meaning “Lord is peace”) in harmony with the angel’s statement “Peace be unto you.” Gideon seized on that expression as being very significant. Similarly, a person sometimes seizes on a particular Scripture because it has meant so much in his Christian experience.

Judges 6:25 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father’s young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

Judges 6:26 And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

Judges 6:27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father’s household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.

God instructed Gideon to destroy the Baal altar on his father’s property and cut down the adjacent grove. Gideon obeyed, but he used *prudence*. And so when the account says “he feared,” the thought is that Gideon used common sense and strategy. He was brave to comply—that is, he was not a coward—but he did not “commit suicide” unnecessarily. Gideon selected ten loyal men to help him, knowing they would not betray him. Moreover, they were strong, for strenuous physical effort would have been involved in destroying the altar and cutting down the grove with an axe in one night. Also, they had to build an altar to God. The Baal altar was in a prominent place, and here was Gideon, the *least* of his father’s sons, ordering its destruction. In addition, the grove probably had sculpted wooden “totem-pole type” idols.

Q: Gideon was told to build an altar to God on the top of the same rock and offer the seven-year-old second bullock for a burnt sacrifice, using wood from the cut-down grove for the fire. Why was the “second” bullock offered, and why was it seven years old? Weren’t younger bullocks usually offered?

A: Depending on the context, sometimes the animal was seven years old, and sometimes it was three years old. There is probably something significant in the antitype, but we have not thought on the matter.

Comment: Perhaps the age of the bullock represented the seven years of servitude under the Midianites.

The destruction of Joash’s Baal altar and the cutting down of the grove had to take place at

night, for otherwise, the work would have been stopped. No doubt, too, that night the Lord caused a deep sleep to come on the people in the surrounding neighborhood.

Judges 6:28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.

Judges 6:29 And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

Judges 6:30 Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it.

Judges 6:31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

Judges 6:32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

Q: Why were the men of the city so incensed that a Baal altar and grove on Joash's property had been destroyed?

A: They probably worshipped there at the Baal altar and the surrounding grove (the Hebrew *asherah*, which had a history of very immoral and grotesque worship). The trees, which were specially designed to be like an open-air church, honored the god Baal. Evidently, the men of the city were so attached to the altar and the grove that they felt it was theirs. As a result, they wanted Gideon to be put to death.

In responding to the cry for Gideon's life, Joash used excellent reasoning: "Will you plead for Baal? Do you mean to say you would kill this mortal man, who cut down the revered idol of Baal? Can't Baal defend and avenge himself? If Baal cannot kill Gideon, why should I kill my son?" Thus Joash challenged the effectiveness of the *inanimate* god, implying that he must be just an idol, a wood stock, that could not do anything.

Undoubtedly Joash was greatly shocked to wake up in the morning and discover the barren waste where the Baal altar and grove had been and another altar erected there. He realized that the timbers had been burned on the new altar and that a prize bullock had been sacrificed.

Comment: The account does not say that Joash was grieved and angry.

Reply: Gideon may have told his father in advance about the strange experience with the appearance of the angel. However, Joash would not have known ahead of time that the Baal altar would be destroyed and the grove would be cut down.

At any rate, the reasoning of Joash was superhuman. It was as though he was given wisdom to know how to reply, for if the Baal worshippers tried to refute the reasoning, they would be admitting their god was weak. Perhaps, too, they had enough respect for Joash that they did not take offense. (A strange thing about human nature is that even if truth is spoken to them, most people are resentful—and to such an extent that they vent their wrath despite the logic.) And that very day Joash called Gideon "Jerubbaal," which means "let Baal plead."

Judges 6:33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

Judges 6:34 But the spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him.

Judges 6:35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

Gideon was confident at first, for the “spirit of the LORD” came upon him. He blew a trumpet and sent messengers to the neighboring tribes in that vicinity (Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali), and they responded. Apparently, news of his cutting down the grove and destroying the notable idol had spread like wildfire. Therefore, when the messengers arrived, asking for help in the coming battle with the Midianites and the Amalekites, the people in each tribe correctly thought that God was raising up another judge.

Judges 6:36 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,

Judges 6:37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

Judges 6:38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

Judges 6:39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

Judges 6:40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Next Gideon offered a very touching prayer, particularly the second time, for he wanted to be sure that God had chosen him. “Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once.” There was nothing wrong with seeking a double assurance, especially against a host that was like grasshoppers in number. Gideon knew his force would be quite small in comparison, so he asked for two fleece tests, namely, (1) that the fleece would be wet and the ground all around dry, and then (2) that the fleece would be dry and the surrounding ground wet. God answered Gideon’s two requests, and out of the mouth of two witnesses, he was assured that God was with him. In fact, from then on, Gideon was a changed person, for once he was convinced that God had selected him, there was no wavering.

Comment: The battle with Sisera ended up in the valley of Jezreel, and that was also the setting here.

Reply: The valley of Jezreel is quite extensive. The valley of Megiddo blossoms out into the belly of northern Israel, which is a large fertile plain called the valley of Jezreel.

Q: With regard to the end of the age, wouldn’t the similar geographic settings for the two battles be clues that these pictures can be spiritualized?

A: The Midianites occupied the valley, which was like a plain, and Gideon was up on the heights. (Remember how in the dream, the loaf of barley bread rolled down into the Midianite camp.) The fact that the valley, or plain, was like a large war amphitheater favored the enemy, for such a numerous host could not conveniently move up on a hill to do battle. Instead they waited for the Israelites to come down and make contact.

Not only was Gideon a man of valor, but his wanting to be sure with regard to the Lord's will manifested his native humility. He did not have *self*-confidence, but when he knew God was with him, he had a lot of confidence.

Judges 7:1 Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

Judges 7:2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

Judges 7:3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

Fear was the first test, or separating factor. The Israelites rose up early in the morning and assembled at Mount Gilead. Thus they appeared eager to obey Gideon's instruction, but when he issued the command "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead," 22,000 left, leaving only 10,000. Surprisingly, approximately *two thirds* of the Israelites went back home. Apparently, a chill went through many of the men as they contemplated what lay ahead. They probably became fearful when they compared their own number to the "grasshopper" multitude of the Midianites.

Judges 7:4 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.

Notice that *God*, not Gideon, was doing the selecting, for He wanted to reduce the number of Israelites even further.

Judges 7:5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.

Judges 7:6 And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

Judges 7:7 And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.

Judges 7:8 So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

The second test pertained to how each of the Israelite men drank water. The chosen 300 did not get down on their knees and put their faces in the water. Rather, they drank by scooping up water with their hands and lapping it like a dog—*watching* all the while. In the meantime, Gideon observed what was happening. As a result of this test, 9,700 more were eliminated. Thus only about 1 percent (one out of 100, or 300 out of 32,000) were selected. Why were those 300 men chosen? They were *on guard constantly, vigilantly watching for the enemy; that is, they looked forward in anticipation to the coming confrontation while they satisfied their need.*

Many years ago we studied this topic with Bro. Magnuson. A tall man of Swedish descent with a rather long face, he impressively demonstrated the water test. He kept looking forward as he scooped up the water and let his tongue drop to lap up the liquid. Usually a dog's eyes are open and looking forward as it laps up water. The point is that the 300 men did not allow their thirst to override the purpose of their being called for the battle. In contrast, the others lost their focus of concentration and thought of just one thing: satisfying their thirst.

God said to Gideon, “By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.” Imagine being one of the 300 and knowing that the number of Midianites was *vast* in the valley below! Evidently, the Israelites were at a little higher elevation and looking down at the host.

“So the people [the 300] took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men.” Food was needed because it was now daytime and the battle did not take place until nighttime. As stated subsequently, the 300 also had pitchers (vessels), torches, and fuel for the torches. The larger host, the 9,700, left their food, trumpets, etc., behind when they departed. Of the common people, the Lord would perform a *mighty* miracle.

Judges 7:9 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

Judges 7:10 But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host:

Judges 7:11 And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host.

Judges 7:12 And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.

Judges 7:13 And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

Judges 7:14 And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

God said to Gideon, “If you have some fear, if you question that only 300 will fight the large enemy host, go down to the Midianite camp and see what they have to say. Afterward you will be strengthened.”

Q: Could God have put two holy angels in the enemy camp to encourage Gideon and Phurah in this incident?

A: That is a possibility, but the enemy host knew the fight was against Gideon, so one of them could have given the response in verse 14. Either way the experience was startling.

Gideon and Phurah went down to the outskirts of the enemy camp, where watchers were usually stationed. Two men were engaged in conversation. One of them said, "I had a dream in which a barley cake rolled down the mountain and flattened the tent below." (Originally, when Gideon was with the 10,000, he was up on the mountain, so the Midianites knew he was at a higher elevation.) The second man gave the interpretation of the dream: "The barley cake represents Gideon, and we, the Midianites, are the tent. We will be defeated by the sword of Gideon, for into his hand has God delivered Midian and all the host." What an encouragement these words were for Gideon!

Judges 7:15 And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

When the dream was recounted, one of the first things Gideon did was to acknowledge and praise God for the assurance. So strong was the assurance that he returned to the 300 and said, "Arise; for the LORD has delivered the host of Midian into your hand."

Judges 7:16 And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.

Judges 7:17 And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.

Judges 7:18 When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

With confidence, Gideon now doled out the supplies—trumpets and empty pitchers with lamps inside—and demonstrated how to handle them. Notice that no swords were mentioned, and the hands of each Israelite would have been full with a trumpet in one hand and a pitcher in the other, yet the host of Midian would be defeated. The 300, who were divided into three groups of 100 each, were to station themselves around the Midianite camp. They were to creep down in the darkness and then watch for Gideon's signal; that is, they were to follow his lead.

Judges 7:19 So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.

Judges 7:20 And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

Judges 7:21 And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.

Judges 7:22 And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in

Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath.

At midnight, the 300 stationed themselves at their posts. At the beginning of the middle watch, Gideon and the 100 who were with him went to the outside of the camp. The middle watch extended from midnight to 3 a.m., so the beginning, midnight, was the changing of the guard, a time when the Midianites were in an unprepared or unsuspecting state. The enemy “had but newly set the watch” when Gideon and his 100 blew their trumpets and broke their pitchers.

The order of action of Gideon and the 300 was as follows. They (1) blew the trumpets, (2) broke the pitchers, (3) displayed the lamps, and (4) shouted in unison, “The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.” (The lamps were held in the left hand and the trumpets in the right hand.) Thus the enemy, rising out of a *deep sleep*, heard the sound of the trumpets followed by the crashing of the pitchers, next saw the lamps, and then heard the shout. (By being inside the pitchers, the light from the lamps was minimized until the pitchers were broken.) This method, or strategy, suggested to the enemy that *each* of the 300 was the leader of a contingent of 1,000 or more men. Moreover, the breaking of the pitchers sounded like clashing armor. Pandemonium resulted with every Midianite’s sword being against his fellow. The survivors fled in panic.

End-of-the-Age Symbolism

The blowing of the trumpet in a concerted effort pictures truth being proclaimed forcibly and loudly.

The breaking of the pitcher represents the death of the human nature, the death of the earthly tabernacle, which will result from the blowing of the trumpet.

Holding the lamp up high indicates *burning zeal* that will be apparent in giving the truth message.

Both the trumpet and the lamp are part of the message, for “trumpet truth” originates in the Word of God. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105).

In the pronouncement “The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon,” the priority, or first honor for the victory, will go to Jehovah. Secondly it will go to Gideon, who represents Jesus.

The 300 men were divided into three companies of 100 each, and Gideon was particularly identified with one of those companies. The three companies represent three classes of the feet members, for “100” indicates 100 percent loyalty and perfection. The 300 were weeded out from the 32,000, for 22,000 left in fear and 9,700 failed the water test. Of the three classes, the fact that Gideon was with one of them suggests that one class has a little more information with regard to when the signal will be given. When Gideon blew his trumpet, the 100 with him recognized the signal and followed shortly thereafter. Then the 200 also blew their trumpets. The type seems to suggest that the other two classes will come from an *outside* source, that is, not from the Truth movement per se. Stated another way, each of the three companies will come from a different background.

Q: In the past, it was suggested that the three different backgrounds would be feet members in countries with predominately (1) the beast, (2) the dragon, and (3) the false prophet. Is this past thought in addition to the suggestion just made about one class being identified with present truth and two classes being from an outside source?

A: Yes. It helps to consider the matter geographically. The beast, the dragon, and the false prophet will speak *in unison* with froglike spirits coming out of their mouths to gather the nations (plural) to the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:13,14,16). Therefore, the end-of-the-age setting is *international*. But in the international situation, certain countries will be dominated by the beast (for example, Spain), some by the false prophet (for example, the United States and

England), and some by civil power, or the dragon (for example, communist countries).

Brethren in communist and strictly Catholic countries do not have access to all the information and truth that we have here in America. The bulk of the information is printed primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries. Even in Poland, where there are many brethren, they lack the quantity of literature that we have. Brethren in the United States and England have the privilege of unlimited congregation and much literature. Hence, geographically speaking, one class is more favored with nearness to Gideon. Nevertheless, all 300 will be accredited equally, so although a panorama of knowledge itself is not the determining factor, there is concerted information in regard to the end of the age, and all 300 will be informed. [Note: It should be kept in mind that this study took place in 1988.]

That is the geographic perspective, but even in favored lands, not all brethren have the same degree of enthusiasm for prophetic understanding. All three companies of 100 drank from the water in the same way; that is, they were *prepared* and *looking ahead*. In other words, according to the truth available in a given area and the circumstances there, the 300 will all be as faithful as they can be.

The fact there are three companies tells us that three classes will be stationed in different places. There is a correspondency with the three Hebrew children who gave a “fatal” witness. The “cords” of flesh were burned to free them, whereas in the Gideon account, the vessels of clay were destroyed.

Q: Since Phurah was on the scene *after* the two tests were given to reduce the number to 300, can we assume that he was one of the 300?

A: Yes, but who Phurah represents probably will not be known until the fulfillment.

Q: How can Gideon represent Jesus when God told him, “If you are fearful, go down to the Midianite camp with your servant Phurah”? Surely the risen Lord would not be fearful. And if the type is taken back as far as the fleece tests, it does not seem that Gideon would picture Jesus there either.

A: That is a good question. Gideon certainly represents a personality, but we will have to wait and see for a more definitive answer. At any rate, the victory is really God’s; it is “the sword of the LORD,” not the sword of the 300 (see verses 2, 18, and 20).

Comment: Gideon was right down there in the battle scene, but he seemed to be separate from or in addition to the 300.

Reply: We will have to wait until the fulfillment.

Judges 7:23 And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.

Judges 7:24 And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan.

Judges 7:25 And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

After the Midianites fled in panic, other Israelites rushed to the scene to cooperate in destroying the enemy. They hurried down to the Jordan to fight on the west side of the river, that is, in Israel proper. The enemy host was a mixed company of Midianites, Amalekites, and children of the east, and all of them had their origin on the far (east) side of the Jordan River. These nations feared that if Gideon was allowed to prosper too much, the Israelites might become organized under him and be a threatening power. During the seven years of oppression prior to Gideon's becoming a judge, the Midianites, etc., came across the border year after year like a locust plague and took what they wanted. Now, with the nation that was their breadbasket gaining strength under Gideon, it was natural for them to try to subdue the Israelites.

Men from the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh pursued after the Midianites. The "men of Ephraim" came from up near Mount Gilboa, Mount Gilead, Shiloh, and Nablus. As a result, the heads of the two Midianite princes, Oreb and Zeeb, were taken to Gideon in Israel proper on the west side of the Jordan River.

The battle was basically over at this point, but other incidents took place, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Some Israelites were dissatisfied because they were not able to participate in the initial portion of the victory over the Midianites.

Q: In the antitype, who is represented by those who subsequently pursued after the Midianites and slew the two Midianite princes?

A: We think they represent some in nominal Christendom. In other words, we do not believe they represent the Great Company.

The end-of-the-age message by the feet members will trigger the thinking of the public to see that they have been deceived in connection with religion. They will become so infuriated when they realize the fraud and masquerade that has been perpetrated on them that they will pull down the system. The feet members will not do the tearing down, but their message will have that effect. The message will be like pushing the switch, and the participants in the actual pursuit, destruction, and slaying will be like Jehu and his army (2 Kings 9:1 through 10:28). Elijah anointed Elisha, and Elisha sent a messenger to Jehu, so Jehu's anointing was thirdhand. However, the anointing was accredited to Elijah (2 Kings 9:36; 10:10,17). Thus Jehu was familiar with the prophecy about Ahab and Jezebel.

Q: Who would Oreb and Zeeb represent in the antitype?

A: They will be particular leaders of the enemy. When we look back in the distant future, all of these pictures will mesh. Right now the 300 and the water test are the important picture with regard to the privilege of the Lord's people at the end of the age, but things are occurring behind the scenes of which we are completely unaware—in politics, in the enemy camp, for example. Satan and his demons are active, but we cannot see their actual manipulations now. And what is Christendom doing in the background? Later on, it may be seen that certain personalities were active at this time. In the picture of the beast, the dragon, and the false prophet, there may be special personalities that we cannot identify today because of our limited vantage point, but they will come to the fore as prominent leaders.

Since the pitchers were already broken when the heads of Oreb and Zeeb were brought to Gideon, the reference may be to Gideon *beyond the veil*. Hence this incident may be another picture. The cut-off heads were trophies of war—just like the sword that David used to decapitate Goliath after killing him with a slingshot. The sword was put in the Tabernacle as a memorial.

Comment: Psalm 83:11,12 mentions Oreb and Zeeb and makes the “houses” they seized sound like religious houses: “Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna: Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession.”

Reply: Oreb and Zeeb would be enemies of the true house of God, that is, leaders in the false system. Jehu destroyed various levels of people in Christendom, from the top down to individual worshippers.

Judges 8:1 And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

The men of Ephraim sharply criticized Gideon for not inviting them to fight against the Midianites.

Judges 8:2 And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?

Why did Gideon compare the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim with the vintage of Abiezer?

Comment: Abiezer was a son of Joseph of the tribe of Manasseh. Therefore, the comparison was between the *tribe* of Ephraim and a *local* vintage gathering.

Reply: Yes. Gideon first invited a localized gathering to come down against the Midianites. However, the latecomers, the men of Ephraim, were more successful in defeating great numbers of the Midianites.

Judges 8:3 God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

Gideon replied to the men of Ephraim, “God delivered Oreb and Zeeb, the two notorious Midianite princes, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?” The Ephraimites’ anger was abated by this clever and diplomatic reply. Actually, however, the success of the battle was due to God’s backing of Gideon and the 300, for in obeying the Lord’s orders, they routed the Midianites. In their haste and flight, the Midianites were easy targets for the others of Israel.

Judges 8:4 And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them.

Judges 8:5 And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

Judges 8:6 And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

The town of Succoth was in Transjordan, for Gideon and his forces had crossed the Jordan River in continuing their pursuit of the remnant of Midian. Tired and hungry, they inquired of the princes of Succoth if they could have bread to sustain them in pursuing after the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna. However, the men of Succoth were reluctant to give assistance.

Their excuse was, “How do we know you will be successful?” Not only did they doubt that Gideon and the 300 would be successful, but also if Gideon lost the battle, they feared reprisal from the Midianites for having given succor.

Judges 8:7 And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.

Gideon’s reply shows he was thoroughly confident the victory was his. It was just a matter of continuing in obedience to the Lord’s command. Not only would he be successful but when he returned, he would punish the princes of Succoth by tearing—that is, threshing or flailing—their flesh with the thorns and briers of the wilderness.

Judges 8:8 And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him.

Judges 8:9 And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

The men of Penuel reacted like the men of Succoth. Therefore, Gideon again promised punishment after victory, saying this time that he would break down the tower of Penuel.

Judges 8:10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword.

Zebah and Zalmunna, who were of the remnant of the Midianite host, had fled to Karkor, and the remaining 15,000 Midianites were with them. Thus far 120,000 Midianites had been slain. The pursuit of these two, plus the 15,000, is described in the next two verses.

Judges 8:11 And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure.

Gideon pursued the remaining Midianite host and attacked the unsuspecting army (see RSV and NIV). Jogbehah is thought to be an earlier name of Ramoth-gilead.

Judges 8:12 And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.

When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, Gideon chased and captured them and discomfited all the host.

Comment: The NIV states that Gideon “pursued them and captured them, routing their entire army.” The RSV says that Gideon “threw all the army into a panic.”

Judges 8:13 And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up,

Judges 8:14 And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men.

Judges 8:15 And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine

hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary?

Judges 8:16 And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth.

Judges 8:17 And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

Gideon was harsher with those of Penuel than with the men of Succoth probably because those of Succoth were more closely related to the Israelites. Thus Gideon fulfilled his promise to go back after the victory and visit punishment upon these two places.

Judges 8:18 Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king.

Judges 8:19 And he said, they were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you.

Earlier Gideon took Zebah and Zalmunna prisoner (see verse 12), but he did not slay them at that time. Next he visited punishment on Succoth and Penuel. Now he began to question these two Midianite kings about the men they had slain at Tabor some years ago. Mount Tabor was on the other side, or west, of the river Jordan near the Sea of Galilee. Of course Zebah and Zalmunna would not have known the names of the men, but they replied that the slain “resembled the children of a king.” From this description and the identification of the area—that is, from two testimonies—Gideon recognized the slain as his brothers and stepbrothers. (They were all sons of his mother, but they were not necessarily all sons of the same father.) For all the slain to have a noble and regal bearing indicates that the family was quite unusual.

Judges 8:20 And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth.

Judges 8:21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks.

Gideon ordered Jether, his firstborn son, to arise and slay Zebah and Zalmunna. Jether was to execute judgment upon the two leaders, but he refused to draw his sword because, being “yet a youth,” he “feared.”

Why did Gideon call his firstborn son for this task? If Jether had complied, he would have received some credit for participation in the notable victory. Also, according to the Law, it was the right of the firstborn (and hence the oldest) son to be the avenger of blood in the execution of justice for a slain family member or relative. Although Gideon gave the right of avenging to his firstborn, he could have immediately done the avenging himself, but he wished to give some prestige to his son. However, Jether felt that he was not strong enough to do the slaying cleanly, for the swords were extremely heavy. The kings themselves were a little nervous lest the youth attempt the slaying and not have the strength to kill them quickly and painlessly. Thus they preferred to be slain by Gideon.

Gideon “took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks” as booty. The crescent-shaped ornaments were made of precious metals and were sometimes decked with jewels. A practice of bedouins was to carry trophies and valuables with them on their camels. Thus a bedouin's wealth could be seen on his camel, and the valuables were in his immediate

possession.

Judges 8:22 Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

Judges 8:23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

After the momentous victory that had taken place under the leadership of Gideon, the people realized the yoke of the enemy had been broken. The Israelites had suffered terrible incursions from the Midianite host, which had marauded and looted their cities and crops and the people themselves. Now, in appreciation, the people wanted to make Gideon a king and his posterity after him. But this was the Period of the Judges, and Saul, the first king, did not take office until many years later. Had Gideon succumbed to the people's suggestion, he would have been king, and a royal dynasty would have been established. In abruptly squelching that suggestion, Gideon said properly, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: [for] the LORD shall rule over you." And such was the attitude of the other judges as well.

Judges 8:24 And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

Judges 8:25 And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.

Judges 8:26 And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks.

Judges 8:27 And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a-whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

Then Gideon asked the men of Israel to give him the gold earrings of the slain 15,000 Midianites (verse 10). The men willingly gave Gideon the earrings, which were part of the booty, and the weight was 1,700 shekels of gold. Incidentally, it is customary for an Ishmaelite to wear at least one heavy gold ring on his ear.

Out of the earrings, Gideon made a gold vest, or ephod, to memorialize the Israelites' great victory over the Midianites. He took the ephod back to the town of Ophrah. The other items—ornaments, collars, and purple raiment—which pertained to the two kings, not to the people at large, were given to Gideon, and he may have shared them with the 300. The implication is that the Israelites were allowed to keep the rest of the booty.

Notice that the account does not say this ephod was used in a religious sense, even though it later became a snare to Gideon and his house. Normally we would associate an ephod with the high priest, but that ephod was of a specific design and had a certain type of embroidery work. Gideon's ephod would have somewhat resembled the high priest's ephod in shape but not in detail. Gideon's purpose in making the ephod was to have a memorial, but just as the serpent on the pole from Moses' day became an object of veneration, so the people did this with Gideon's ephod.

"All Israel went thither a-whoring after it [the ephod]: which thing became a snare unto

Gideon, and to his house.” We will find out a little information about Gideon’s house as we proceed, but we should remember that he was an outstanding individual in the Lord’s sight, for he is mentioned by name as an Ancient Worthy (Heb. 11:32). Therefore, when the account states that the ephod became a snare to Gideon and his house, we would understand that it was a temptation and that it received undue recognition by some, but it was not worshipped. Had Gideon realized the ephod would become a snare, he would not have ordered that it be made, for it had a damaging effect on the Israelites.

Judges 8:28 Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

Gideon’s judgeship lasted for 40 years, which was quite a long time.

Judges 8:29 And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.

“Jerubbaal,” another name for Gideon, was given when he cut down the grove on his father’s property.

Judges 8:30 And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives.

Here it is stated that Gideon had 70 sons of many wives. The Israelites were permitted to have multiple wives up to the time of the Babylonian captivity.

Judges 8:31 And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.

Gideon’s concubine in Shechem bore him an additional son named Abimelech (see Judges 9:2).

Judges 8:32 And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites.

Judges 8:33 And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a-whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.

Gideon died “in a good old age” and was buried in his hometown. As soon as he was dead, “the children of Israel turned again” to the worship of Baal and made Baal-berith, which means “lord of the covenant,” their god.

Judges 8:34 And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:

Judges 8:35 Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shown unto Israel.

When Gideon died, the whole arrangement fell apart. Not only did the Israelites revert back to their former idolatrous practices, forgetting Jehovah, “who had rescued them from the hand of all their enemies on every side,” but also they did not show kindness to the family of Gideon “in return for all the good that he had done to Israel” (see RSV).

Judges 9:1 And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother’s brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother’s father, saying,

Judges 9:2 Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.

Judges 9:3 And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother.

Judges 9:4 And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him.

Judges 9:5 And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself.

Judges 9:6 And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

The name Abimelech is frequently a title of a king or prince, but here it was the name of a son of Gideon. Abimelech went to his "mother's brethren" in Shechem, so we know that his concubine mother had relatives and that her family was not closely identified with Gideon's family. Abimelech made an appealing suggestion to the family of his mother: "Which would you rather have? Would you rather be under the rule of 70 people or under the rule of one person, who is a relative of yours?" Of course that one person was Abimelech himself because of his relationship to the concubine, and the logical choice of the hearers was to follow him. Accordingly, they said, "He is our brother." Then, in order for Abimelech to employ a bodyguard and a little force of his own, the men of Shechem gave him 70 pieces of silver from the Baal-berith treasury to hire assassins called "vain and light persons."

Abimelech went to his father's house at Ophrah and slew his brothers, the other sons of Gideon, "upon one stone." All 70 were slain minus Jotham, the youngest son, who hid himself. In other words, Abimelech intended to eliminate all potential heirs to the throne so that he, as the only son left, would be the heir apparent. The 69 sons were slain on an "execution rock," which may have been an altar to Baal.

All the men of Shechem and all the house of Millo then gathered together and made Abimelech king "by the plain [or oak] of the pillar that was in Shechem." Simply stated, a coronation ceremony was held. This oak had a religious connotation that went back to Abraham. When Abraham entered the Promised Land from Haran, he first went to Shechem (also called Sichem) and there built an altar (Gen. 12:6,7). In the final analysis, however, the purpose of this rock deteriorated, and it became an altar to Baal. The "oak" is also noted in Scripture as a crude place of worship. The plain was conveniently in front so that the coronation ceremony, which was given sort of a religious benediction, was conspicuous in the sight of others.

Judges 9:7 And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

The "oak"—and hence the coronation site—was near Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessing, which was also in Shechem. Mount Ebal, the mount of cursing, was nearby as well. When the blessings and cursings of Moses were enunciated from these two mountains in Joshua's day, the people in the valley below heard them (Deuteronomy 28; Josh. 8:30-35). The acoustics between these two mountains were so good that the site was like an outdoor auditorium.

Now Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon and the only survivor of the 70, climbed up Mount Gerizim. As the coronation ceremony was taking place quite a distance below, Jotham shouted down to those who were crowning Abimelech, "Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you." Then he proceeded to give a parable (verses 8-15) and the meaning of the parable (verses 16-20).

Judges 9:8 The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.

Judges 9:9 But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Judges 9:10 And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us.

Judges 9:11 But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Judges 9:12 Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us.

Judges 9:13 And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Judges 9:14 Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us.

Judges 9:15 And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

Judges 9:16 Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;

Judges 9:17 (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian:

Judges 9:18 And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;)

Judges 9:19 If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you:

Judges 9:20 But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech.

Judges 9:21 And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

In ancient times, people liked to hear someone speak in parables. Therefore, when the coronation ceremony was taking place and Jotham began to speak his parable, the men of Shechem and the house of Millo were listening. Of course they did not know initially that the parable portended a curse. Jotham was up in a strategic place on Mount Gerizim where he

could be heard, and since it would have taken considerable time for those of Shechem and Millo to reach him, he was able to finish what he had to say and then escape. Moreover, they probably did not get the drift of what Jotham was suggesting until about the middle of the parable. Jotham ended his parable with a curse on Abimelech and those of Shechem and Millo.

There are three ways to interpret this parable, and all of them are valuable. We will treat all three, starting with the more obvious application, which pertains to the circumstances existing at that time.

1. Application in Jotham's Day

The "trees," who represented the people of Shechem and Millo, wanted a king to reign over them, for ambition for rulership was in their midst. When the time came to choose the king, four illustrations were given in a *descending* order of importance. The olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine all declined the offer to be king, but the fourth, the bramble, accepted. As the position of rulership was proffered—"Come thou, and reign over us"—the first three declined because they were satisfied with their present role and what they had. The olive tree said, "Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?" The fig tree replied, "Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?" And the vine reasoned, "Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?" Of course, as the men of Shechem and Millo were listening to this parable, they knew that Abimelech was being inaugurated as king.

When the proposition was put forth to the bramble (Abimelech), the lowest candidate on the ladder, he accepted. Not only did the bramble *readily accept*, but also he stipulated *conditions of acceptance*: "If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow." And if the conditions were not agreeable, the bramble said in effect, "Let fire come out of me and devour the cedars of Lebanon [those who feel they are so secure and stout]." Indeed a little flame from a match can set a forest on fire, devouring the biggest and sturdiest of trees.

Jotham reminded those of Shechem and Millo, "My father Gideon fought for you and risked his life in delivering you from the Midianites, yet you have risen up against his house this day and have slain his 70 sons and made Abimelech king, the son of his maidservant, because he is your brother." Jotham continued, "If you have acted truly and sincerely in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Gideon and his house, and have done to Gideon as his deeds deserved, then you have cause to rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if you have not dealt well and truly with Gideon and his house, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from the house of Millo and devour Abimelech also." If this rebellion did not have God's approval, then not only would fire come out from the bramble (Abimelech) and destroy his supporters, but Abimelech would be caught in his own destruction. In other words, "If you have not done honestly and properly, then let God's curse come upon you."

Jotham was saying to them in effect, "You do not realize it, but in selecting one of your own to be king, you are committing suicide." The bramble had suggested that his opponents would be destroyed if they did not put their trust under his shadow, but instead the experience would bring retribution upon the bramble and his supporters.

Then Jotham fled as rapidly as possible, for he knew that Abimelech and those of Shechem and Millo, being indignant at hearing the parable, would climb Mount Gerizim to seize and slay him. About the middle of the parable, they began to realize it was unfavorable to them.

2. General Lessons for the Christian

The olive tree was the most important and useful of the trees that were enumerated because of the variety of benefits derived from it. In a natural sense, the olive and its oil were used for food, light, medicine, and the anointing of kings. In a spiritual sense, the oil represents the Holy Spirit, which has various fruits. Another lesson in the parable is that the olive tree represents a ten-talented Christian, male or female. Such individuals have several avenues of ability and usefulness in the Lord's service.

In the parable, the "trees," the people, desired a king. In a spiritual sense, professed Christians have the desire to follow a leader. Accordingly, it was said to the olive tree, "Reign thou over us." With others initiating the suggestion, we can see the power of this subtle temptation.

However, the olive tree declined the invitation because he was already bearing fruit and did not want to forsake some of the activities of his full-time service whereby he was honoring God and being a blessing to others in the use of his talents. If he reigned and exercised rulership over the trees, he would have to turn away from certain fruitage in order to take on other responsibilities. He would be forsaking *natural* fruits to enter an *untried* field. The olive tree showed humility by turning down the opportunity to reign.

The parable illustrates the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:8, "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." The last time the Apostle Paul saw the elders of the church of Ephesus, he instructed them not to be lords over the congregation but to picture themselves as shepherds who were responsible to God, their over-Shepherd (Acts 20:28-32). In connection with the service of elders, it is *God's* flock, not their flock.

Next came the fig tree, which pictures a five-talented Christian. The fig tree bears sweet fruit and has medicinal qualities to a certain extent. However, it cannot light a lamp like the olive tree. The fig tree also turned down the invitation to reign.

The vine likewise declined to reign. A vine, which creeps over the earth, pictures the least-talented Christian.

What, then, is an overall lesson? As Christians, we are endowed *by nature* with certain talents. Regardless of the number of talents, we are to *use* them and not try to cultivate new talents, for the olive tree produces olives, the fig tree yields figs, and the vine has grapes. For example, it is unwise for a Christian to go to college to learn a talent he does not already have. Instead the time should be used as a talent in the Lord's service. Education should be considered carefully, for there are dangers in living away from home, taking studies that are inimical to the interests of the new creature, expending considerable time and years, etc. Education should be *within reason* for a *natural* talent, or ability, that *already exists*.

In contrast with the first three, which all bore fruit, the bramble had no fruit but bore thorns instead. While the bramble was the lowest in this listing, it was not humble. When the suggestion was made to rule, it not only said yes but also seemed to have a prepared answer and then dictated conditions. The bramble boldly accepted the invitation and said, "Come and put your trust in my shadow." It is dangerous, especially from a spiritual standpoint, for a leader on any level to encourage others to follow or worship him. The counsel should be to trust in the *Lord*, but the bramble liked the leadership role and wanted others to lean on him. The Scriptures warn Christians not to worship "angels," that is, elders, bishops, etc. As the Apostle Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am [a follower] of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). We should follow elders only to the extent that we see they are led *of the Lord* and that we are

helped in being led to a better understanding of the Scriptures. But even then we should always have a measure of reserve so that we could easily detach ourselves and follow the *Lord* should some untoward circumstance develop.

What are the characteristics of a bramble? A bramble chokes out good plants and growth. Not a tiny plant in this illustration, it was a climbing type of bramble that smothered everything underneath its control. For example, some leaders brainwash others and force individuals to echo them, and they get angry if opposed. Too much shade (created by the “shadow” of the bramble) shuts out the sun, which is needed for growth, and adversely affects oxygenation and photosynthesis.

3. Spiritual Application to Papacy

When the bramble accepted the invitation to reign as king, it said, “If you are not willing to put your trust in my shadow, let fire come out of me, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.” A bramble is noted for burning quickly and furiously—like a dry Christmas tree. This characteristic shows the disposition of a dictatorial spirit that will not tolerate disagreement, that is, a Nicolaitan spirit (Rev. 2:6,15). Specifically, the bramble represents Papacy, which has manifested a Nicolaitan spirit down through history, especially during the Dark and Middle Ages. However, this spirit can exist even in an ecclesia. The ecclesia slant is as follows.

Some people have the erroneous idea that the way to shepherd the flock is to “sterilize” the room to keep out all “germs.” Such leaders try to prevent those under their influence from going anywhere else lest they get “contaminated.” However, a little sun, storm, wind, frost, etc., in the proper proportion actually *strengthen* the plant. The “exercise” deepens the roots so that the plant can stand on its own later on, whereas a plant kept protected in a hothouse is not healthy. Therefore, a shepherd should counsel but not dictate, for we are free moral agents. Yes, we should have reserve, but that reserve does not necessarily mean there is no respect. The thought is to always be careful, for as the years go by, we see startling results develop where they are least expected. Therefore, with both the teachers and those who are taught, there should be a reserve and a flexibility that are reasonable and proper for development.

Q: Why did Jotham decide to give a parable rather than to speak directly?

A: Parables and fables were frequently used in the past, for they were an effective teaching method in the Middle East and Asia. In the New Testament, Jesus gave one parable after another. Parables and fables suggest deep truths in an attractive manner. With regard to Jotham, if he had gone to the top of Mount Gerizim and just laced into Abimelech and his followers right away, they would have immediately run up there and interrupted him. Jotham wanted to give a lesson, and he needed time to finish it. Then the hearers could draw their own conclusions that Abimelech was worthless, deceitful, selfish, and self-centered as a leader. Just as fire would come out of the bramble, so Abimelech would not hesitate to kill anyone who opposed him. Jotham was trying to show that several others were far more qualified than Abimelech, but they were humble and, realizing the responsibility of rulership, recognized the propriety of seeking the *Lord's* method through the Gideon line. The worthless Abimelech had exalted himself, and Jotham warned of the danger that would ensue for those who maintained submission to him. They would be crushed into abject subjects under his control.

Therefore, in answer to the question, the parable was a delaying tactic. Abimelech’s followers would listen to try to figure out what the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine represented. Not until Jotham got to the bramble did they understand the lesson and start to pursue him. But Jotham, being on top of the mountain or on the side of the hill, got to speak the last few words and then ran. He successfully got away and went to Beer.

Judges 9:22 When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,

Judges 9:23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech:

Judges 9:24 That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren.

Who were the men of Shechem? The setting of Jotham's Parable was the Nablus area near Mount Gerizim. The men of Shechem had urged Abimelech to reign, and they had given him 70 pieces of silver to hire assassins to kill Gideon's sons.

When Abimelech had reigned for three years over Israel, "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem"; that is, God permitted the circumstances that led to friction between them. Sometimes statements are made in Scripture in a way that, to our Western way of thinking, is too direct, and that is true of the word "sent." The word "allowed" would have been a better translation. Thus God was not morally responsible, for He does not tempt any man with evil, but He can allow a circumstance that results in a certain situation (James 1:13). For example, God allowed an evil Pharaoh to be on the throne of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. Individuals have a free will to decide to do good or evil, but being aware of their characteristics in advance, God knows what will happen if they assume office.

Adam is another example of God's foreknowledge, for He knew in advance that Adam would partake of the fruit. God also knew that Eve would succumb first and that the Adversary would tempt the woman in the Garden of Eden. Here, then, are three characters—the man, the woman, and the serpent—where God clearly knew what would happen. He did give a warning initially, but He could have stopped the disobedience by interfering with Satan's possession of the serpent, He could have warned the woman a second time, and He could have told Adam of the dire circumstance. Instead He just allowed the situation, and the result was Adam's fall. God knew in advance what Satan intended to do, that the woman had a weakness and would be deceived, and that Adam would willingly partake of the forbidden fruit because of his affection for Eve.

When God sent the "evil spirit," the men of Shechem "dealt treacherously" with Abimelech; that is, God interfered in the sense of allowing a conspiracy so that Abimelech's reign would cease. This was retribution for the cruelty that had been done to the 70 sons of Gideon. Bloodguilt was laid upon Abimelech, their brother, and upon the men of Shechem, who had supported him in slaying his brethren. Therefore, both were guilty: Abimelech and the men of Shechem.

Judges 9:25 And the men of Shechem set liars in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech.

Judges 9:26 And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

Judges 9:27 And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech.

Judges 9:28 And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we

should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him?

Judges 9:29 And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out.

The men of Shechem set an ambush in the top of the mountains and robbed all who passed by. Thus they sustained themselves by stealing from others. Gaal, the son of Ebed, was permitted to come along to act as the Lord's executioner. He suggested a conspiracy at just the right time, that is, when the men of Shechem were reveling with merriment and feasting. Not only were they having a good time, but Gaal interspersed remarks suggesting that Abimelech was not an authentic heir, or descendant, of Shechem. Gaal said to the Shechemites in effect, "Appoint someone to rule over you other than a half brother of Gideon's sons. Why not appoint one of your own kind—someone from the mainstream of the family of Shechem—to rule instead?" Gaal may well have been of that family through the father, so his suggestion seemed very logical. Then he went even further by saying, "Would to God this people were under *my* hand! Then would I remove Abimelech and be his supplanter." Gaal was preparing the way for his *own* exaltation. We are reminded of Absalom, a son of David, who sat in the gate and said to the people, "If I were the king, I would do such and such."

Incidentally, a strange characteristic of many today is that in the workplace, they fawn, smile, and shake hands with a supervisor, but as soon as he leaves the room, they turn around and curse him or make derogatory jokes or statements about him, implying that someone should take his place. Such acts are a streak of cowardice.

A little time interval is indicated in verse 29 after Gaal suggested he would remove Abimelech. Later on, Gaal confidently began to taunt Abimelech by challenging him to increase his army and come out to fight.

Judges 9:30 And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled.

Judges 9:31 And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee.

Judges 9:32 Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field:

Judges 9:33 And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion.

Zebul sent messengers to inform Abimelech of Gaal's conspiracy, suggesting that Abimelech go out at night and lie in wait in the field for Gaal and his men to return. Then Abimelech and his followers would be able to come up behind Gaal and those with him. The surprise attack would enable Abimelech to successfully put down the rebellion.

Judges 9:34 And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies.

Judges 9:35 And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait.

Judges 9:36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men.

Judges 9:37 And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim.

Judges 9:38 Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them.

Judges 9:39 And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech.

The strategy to put down the rebellion was that Abimelech and his men would come up in four companies behind Gaal. When Gaal saw them, he said to Zebul, "Look, men are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" Zebul replied, "You see the *shadows* of the mountains, and you mistake them for men." Of course Zebul knew they were men, but he was trying to dissuade Gaal from fully comprehending what was happening, so he got a little sarcastic. However, Gaal realized that men were definitely coming and said, "Look, men are coming down from the center of the land, and one company is coming from the direction of the Diviners' Oak" (NIV). This "oak" was usually a large tree with luxuriant foliage that provided shade; the effect was of a natural chapel in the woods. People came to this shrine-like place for counsel from a representative of Baal or some other god. The representative divined in different ways such as giving counsel, going into a trance, or taking the longer process of disemboweling an animal and examining the liver to see if it was an omen of good or of evil.

Then Zebul said to Gaal in effect, "Where is your big talk now? You said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Are not these the men you ridiculed? Go fight them!" So Gaal went out of Shechem and fought with Abimelech.

Judges 9:40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate.

Judges 9:41 And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem.

Judges 9:42 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech.

Judges 9:43 And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them.

Judges 9:44 And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them.

Judges 9:45 And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

Gaal and his men were defeated. Thus Abimelech thrust out those who had incited an insurrection. The city was beaten down and sowed with salt so that nothing would grow there for years. Symbolically, the sowing of salt was like trying to wipe out the memory of a place.

(The account does not clearly identify whether this was Shechem or another city.)

Judges 9:46 And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith.

Judges 9:47 And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

Judges 9:48 And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done.

Judges 9:49 And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women.

The setting was now the tower of Shechem. When all the men of the tower heard of Gaal's defeat, they entered into the stronghold of the house of the god Berith. Upon hearing this, Abimelech cut down a tree bough, laid it on his shoulder, and instructed the men with him to do likewise. (It is almost as if Jotham's Parable had a prophetic application, for the bramble had said, "If anyone does not follow me, let fire come out from me and destroy him.") Next Abimelech and his men laid the cut tree boughs against the stronghold of the house of Berith and set the boughs on fire so that the hold and all the men and women inside, who numbered about 1,000, were burned to death.

Judges 9:50 Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it.

Judges 9:51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower.

Judges 9:52 And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

Judges 9:53 And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull.

Judges 9:54 Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

Judges 9:55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place.

Now we are seeing the retribution that came upon Abimelech. He besieged Thebez, and when he was successful in entering the city, the inhabitants took refuge on the top of a strong tower. Abimelech went toward the door of the tower of Thebez to burn it with fire, as he had done to the tower of Shechem. However, as he approached, a woman threw down a millstone and hit him on the head. The terminology "and all to brake his skull" means "with the sole intent of crushing his skull." Because of the weight, she probably used leverage to lift up the round millstone and cast it down upon his head. Realizing he was dying, Abimelech asked his armor bearer to dispatch him with a sword lest it be said that a woman had slain him. Thus Abimelech died, but his efforts had been rather futile, for word spread that a woman was responsible.

Judges 9:56 Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren:

Judges 9:57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

The account shows that Jotham's Parable, which had a moral lesson and was in the nature of a curse, was also prophetic. Not only did retribution come on Abimelech's supporters, but through them, it came on Abimelech himself. The Shechemites had said, "Come thou, and reign over us," but later, when they tried to kill Abimelech, fire destroyed them (Judg. 9:14). Thus fire came out of the bramble and destroyed its enemies, but Abimelech, the chief personage needing retribution, got his just deserts.

Abimelech was a son of Jerubbaal (Gideon) through a concubine, whereas the 70 were direct sons through his wives and thus were heirs apparent.

Judges 10:1 And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim.

Judges 10:2 And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir.

After Abimelech, Tola arose to judge Israel. With only two verses covering his judgeship, which lasted for 23 years, we cannot assume that he was an Ancient Worthy. The Lord providentially raised up each judge, but whether the individual remained faithful we do not know. The Book of Hebrews mentions four who were faithful: Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah (Heb. 11:32). Thus far the judges were mostly in northern Israel.

In the Kingdom, God will restore Israel's judges "as at the first" (Isa. 1:26). Therefore, the government of the Kingdom Age will be similar in certain respects to the Period of the Judges, but that does not necessarily mean the judges will be the same individuals.

Judges 10:3 And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years.

Judges 10:4 And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havoth-jair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead.

Judges 10:5 And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.

Jair was the next judge, and only three verses are devoted to his judgeship of 22 years. The time period covered by the combined judgeships of Tola and Jair was almost 50 years. Jair's 30 sons rode on 30 asses. In other words, his sons were judges too, and this practice was followed by other judges as well. The 30 cities corresponded with the judgeships of Jair's 30 sons. Incidentally, the asses were white if possible.

Judges 10:6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

Judges 10:7 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.

Judges 10:8 And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead.

Judges 10:9 Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and His anger was hot against them. For 18 years, therefore, Israel was vexed and oppressed chiefly at the hands of the Ammonites and the Philistines, who were in Israel on the Mediterranean coast. Although the Ammonites made an incursion into Israel proper to fight against Judah and Benjamin, they primarily distressed the Israelites who had settled east of the Jordan River. Meanwhile, the Philistines were a thorn in the flesh to the Jews in Israel proper. The nation of Israel was situated between the Philistines on the west and the Ammonites on the east.

The Israelites were contaminated with multiple gods: Baalim (plural) and Ashtaroath (a female goddess) and the gods of Syria, Zidon (in Lebanon), Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. The name Baal was associated with many of these other gods.

Q: Why did the Israelites want to worship these gods?

A: They wanted to worship something visible. At the same time, they went through the ritual of serving Jehovah, but that worship was perfunctory and improper. By equating Jehovah with these false gods, they had essentially forsaken the God of Israel.

Judges 10:10 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.

Judges 10:11 And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines?

Judges 10:12 The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.

Judges 10:13 Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.

Judges 10:14 Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

Judges 10:15 And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.

Judges 10:16 And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

Judges 10:17 Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh.

Judges 10:18 And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants

of Gilead.

The Israelites cried unto God for deliverance. They would have petitioned Him through either the priesthood or whatever prophet was recognized of the Lord at that time. Someone like Samuel was a prophet, but because he exercised so much influence, he was called a judge. In this case, if a prophet carried the Israelites' cry to the Lord, he would have been of lesser influence. At any rate, God refused to hearken because of the people's repeated disobedience.

The Israelites had departed from the Lord and were worshipping a variety of gods, trying to be very liberal and democratic like the other nations. It took 18 years before the Israelites came fully to their senses. By then, their frustrations and grievances were so great that they called on the Lord with real sincerity. What was His reply? He said in effect, "Consider how many times I delivered you in the past, yet you are disobeying again by worshipping other gods. Why don't you ask them to help you out of your problem?"

The situation was coming to a crisis at this point because the Ammonites were no longer satisfied with just vexing and plundering the Israelites. Now they were gathered together and encamped in Gilead in preparation for complete subjugation of at least the territory east of the Jordan River: Reuben, Gad, and one half of Manasseh. These 2 1/2 tribes were called Gileadites.

The Israelites were encamped in Mizpeh, and this particular Mizpeh was across the Jordan in Gilead. It was probably at this site in Gilead many years earlier that Jacob and Laban had formed a treaty. When friction developed between them, Jacob left Laban, but as a result of Laban's pursuit of Jacob, an agreement was reached, and a pile of stones served as a witness (Gen. 31:43-53).

However, the 2 1/2 tribes were without a leader for fighting the threatening Ammonites, who were hostile and numerous, and this was a battle for survival. Therefore, the Israelites wanted someone to fight on their behalf.

Chapter 10 is introductory to chapter 11 in that it sets the scene for Jephthah. The tenth chapter races down through part of the Period of the Judges: 23 years of Tola's judgeship and 22 years of Jair's judgeship. Then the account stops to describe 18 years of oppression and misery, which led to the gathering of the Ammonites in Gilead and the leaderless Israelites in Mizpeh. As the latter asked who would fight on their behalf, they said in effect, "If the one who leads us in fighting the Ammonites is successful, he will be our permanent head, or leader, in Gilead."

Comment: This time the Lord did not just let the Israelites cry to Him for deliverance. They first had to *put away* their false gods—they had to demonstrate *with acts*—before God would hearken and send a deliverer, before He would be compassionate with regard to their plight and raise up a judge.

Reply: That is true, but since God, with His omniscience, had foreseen the situation that developed, He prepared Jephthah during the 18 years of oppression so that he could come to the fore at the crucial hour.

Judges 11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

Judges 11:2 And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman.

Judges 11:3 Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

Gilead is an area, but it was also the name of Jephthah's father. Gilead had several sons, but Jephthah was the black sheep of the family because he was the son of a harlot. Of course Jephthah was not responsible for his mother's disreputable background, but when the sons of Gilead's wife grew up, they disenfranchised him and thrust him out, saying, "You shall not inherit in our father's house because you are the son of a strange woman." Therefore, Jephthah fled to the land of Tob and dwelled there.

Notice the statement "Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour"; that is, prior to his fleeing, he *already* had a reputation as a mighty warrior. Thus there was some unrecorded history about Jephthah's deeds for which he was recognized as a man of extreme courage and valor. Now, in this crucial hour when a leader was needed to fight against the Ammonites, the other sons of Gilead, who did not feel capable of such leadership, thought of Jephthah and his past reputation (see verses 5 and 6).

When Jephthah had fled, others—"vain men" or "worthless fellows" (RSV)—followed him. (We are reminded of David, for outcasts rallied to his cause when he fled from Saul's presence.) These men were probably "worthless" from the standpoint of the general populace. Jephthah was not in favor, and neither were those who associated with him; that is, they were not in high esteem. However, the people had to admit that Jephthah's former exploits—whatever they were—were very unusual. Like David, he was a natural leader.

Judges 11:4 And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel.

Judges 11:5 And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:

Judges 11:6 And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon.

Judges 11:7 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

Judges 11:8 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

Judges 11:9 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

Judges 11:10 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

Judges 11:11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

When, in the process of time, the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead fetched Jephthah out of the land of Tob. In Mizpeh, an agreement was made that if Jephthah was victorious against the Ammonites, he would be head over the inhabitants of Gilead.

Judges 11:12 And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

Judges 11:13 And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.

Judges 11:14 And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon:

Judges 11:15 And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon:

Judges 11:16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh;

Judges 11:17 Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh.

Judges 11:18 Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab.

Judges 11:19 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place.

Judges 11:20 But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

Judges 11:21 And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

Judges 11:22 And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

Judges 11:23 So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it?

Judges 11:24 Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

Judges 11:25 And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them,

Judges 11:26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?

Judges 11:27 Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.

Judges 11:28 Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

Arnon and Jabbok are rivers; hence they were boundary lines. The Jordan River, which runs from north to south, was a barrier on the west. The Arnon River was a boundary on the south, and the Jabbok River was on the north. Of course the eastern boundary was Ammon itself, which was quite a large area of mostly desert land with indefinite boundaries.

The Ammonites' reason for coming to fight Israel was their claim that the territory was originally theirs, and they wanted it back. The Israelites supposedly took illegal possession of the land in Moses' day, before his death. If Jephthah consented to their demands and returned the land peaceably, the Israelites would be squeezed into the northern sector on the west side of the Jordan River. They would lose all the land from the river Jabbok in the north to the river Arnon in the south.

Jephthah refused such an unreasonable concession, saying that the demand was erroneous to start with. God gave the land to the Israelites because the Ammonites had refused to give them passage when they were coming up from the Sinai wilderness.

Comment: The Ammonites' demand sounds like present history in the Middle East where the Israelis are urged to return territory they got because the Arabs started a war in the first place. The Arabs mistakenly think they are the wronged ones.

In verses 15-27, Jephthah returned a message to the leadership of Ammon. He gave a lengthy review of the history of the Israelites when they left Sinai at the end of the 40-year period and were coming north preparatory to entering the Promised Land. (This recounting is a helpful condensation of events that are recorded in the Book of Numbers.) Moses asked permission to go north on the east side of the Dead Sea and enter the Promised Land by way of Jericho. This would allow the Israelites to take the better and higher route up out of the desert heat. Moses promised that the Israelites would not invade the property but would stay on the road and pay for provisions.

When this reasonable request was denied, Moses and the 2 million Israelites had to take the difficult desert route and skirt Moab and Ammon. This meant they had to backtrack and go way south, retracing their steps almost down to the Gulf of Eilat. Then they came up on the other side and went north again, bypassing Edom on the right side. They were way down on the desert level, which was extremely hot.

At one point, the Amorites tried to stop the Israelites from even making progress up the desert route. Warfare ensued, and God gave the Israelites the victory. As a result, the Amorites were dispossessed, and the Israelites got part of the territory occupied by the Moabites. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and one half of Manasseh settled there. Nevertheless, Moses consulted with the Lord, and an agreement was made whereby the men of war of those 2 1/2 tribes had to accompany the other Israelites into the Promised Land west of Jordan and help fight their battles. When the land was conquered, the men of the 2 1/2 tribes could return to their families whom they had left behind.

Jephthah beautifully and concisely summed up the Israelites' experience at that time in history. (We are reminded of Stephen's account in the Book of Acts where he traced some of Israel's history from another standpoint.) In effect, Jephthah's reply, if we were to condense it further, was that the land never was Ammon's, for at the most, it was Moab's. The part Israel possessed had been largely occupied and technically owned by Moab. When the Moabites frustrated

Israel and were defeated in battle, a portion was left for them. Jephthah reasoned further that for 300 years, the Moabites did not contest Israel's authority to have the land. In the beginning, the Amorites and the Moabites were involved, not the Ammonites, but the Moabites did nothing. Jephthah added in effect, "Now, at this late date, you Ammonites want this land to be handed to you peaceably. Your demand is highly unreasonable, and we will not consent." But the king of the Ammonites would not hearken to Jephthah.

It was well that Jephthah replied to the Ammonites as he did, for he said he would act in the name of the Lord. In essence, he said, "Let God decide the matter." In other words, Jephthah would not fight in his own strength. He reasoned, "The matter really boils down to a contest between Jehovah and Chemosh, the god of the Ammonites. Let your god fight for you, and our God will fight for us. Whoever we overcome will be under our subjection." Jephthah's words remind us of David when he slew Goliath in the name of the Lord.

Judges 11:29 Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

"The spirit of the LORD [which] came upon Jephthah" was a strengthening power. He already was a mighty man of valor, and now he got additional strength, wisdom for a strategy to use, and an influence that would pervade those he was leading. Great leaders enthuse their followers. For example, Napoleon was gifted that way. In many of his campaigns, his soldiers were willing to fight to their death, for they felt he was one of them. Moreover, he thought of their interests and welfare in connection with the battles they fought. When they suffered, he suffered with them. So this "spirit" coming on Jephthah was a supply above and beyond that which he possessed as a natural man or as a natural accomplishment. Then the account tells that Jephthah pursued and even went into the land of Ammon itself to fight the Ammonites.

Judges 11:30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

Judges 11:31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

Jephthah made a vow to God that if victorious, he would give as a burnt offering whatever would "come forth of the doors" of his house to meet him upon his return. Jephthah probably thought that a servant or an animal would come out of his house. In regard to the "burnt offering" aspect, he did fulfill his vow, but we do not believe that he ultimately burned his daughter on the altar. Therefore, he used the term "burnt offering" in a figurative sense, meaning that he wanted to show his appreciation to the Lord for blessings received. Thus it would be an offering of praise. In other words, whatever came out of his house would be *dedicated* to God. Of course Jephthah did not know what would happen, so this was a rash promise. Sometimes, as here, some of the best people make statements in an emotional outburst of enthusiasm, not realizing the full import of what they are saying.

Q: Why did Jephthah use the word "doors" (plural)? Could it mean "household" in the sense of including the servants' quarters and all dwellings on his property? Then he would not necessarily have been thinking of his own particular dwelling.

A: Yes, "household" is the thought. Whatever came forth of all the dwellings would be dedicated to the Lord.

Judges 11:32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.

Judges 11:33 And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

Jephthah was successful in this warfare “with a very great slaughter.” He carried the battle right into the main territory of the Ammonites, into their 20 cities in the area. Now he would return to his home.

Judges 11:34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

Judges 11:35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

Judges 11:36 And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

Judges 11:37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.

Judges 11:38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

Judges 11:39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

Judges 11:40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

These verses give us a little clearer picture of what it was that Jephthah vowed and how it was performed. The implication is that he kept his promise in the spirit in which he had made it. First, however, there was a two-month interval in which his daughter bewailed her virginity. This statement is a clue as to what the vow entailed. She became like a nun, as it were, for she had to dedicate her life to the Lord and could not marry. According to Jephthah’s vow, “she knew no man”; that is, she had to remain single. This fact was emphasized both before and after the two-month period. Hence the “burnt offering” was *figurative*; it was very real in that it was *costly*, but it was not a literal sacrifice upon a literal altar.

Q: If an animal had come out, the sacrifice could have been literal. Jephthah’s daughter was submissive to the vow, but if a male servant or someone else had come out and then tried to disobey the vow, would Jephthah have had to enforce it?

A: Yes, if the party disobeyed, he would have to be put to death. In other words, whoever came out (male or female) would have to dedicate his or her life to the Lord, particularly to religious service. If the person refused to obey, he would have to be stoned to death and then

burned.

Q: What principles are involved here? The first principle would be that a vow *must be kept*. In addition, we do not have the right to make a vow for someone else, forcing the person into dedication to the Lord.

A: In the Gospel Age, the situation is different from that in the Jewish Age. For example, if a daughter in the Jewish Age made a vow to the Lord, the father could disannul it before sundown. However, she had to be living in his household and be unmarried and dependent upon him for her livelihood—even if she was an adult.

The spirit of Jephthah's daughter was very unusual. She said in effect, "Whatever you vowed to the Lord, I am agreeable, for look what He has done—He has delivered us from the Ammonites. I will be glad to comply with your vow, even though you are now sorry. I will ask just this one thing: to be given a period of two months in which to bemoan my situation on the mountains." Her words are touching.

Comment: The fact that Jephthah himself had not had a normal family life because he was the son of a harlot and was subsequently thrust out by his father's wife must have made his relationship to his daughter, his *only child, very special and tender*. Therefore, obedience to the vow was a real sacrifice. No seed would be brought forth. There would be no grandchildren.

Reply: Yes, the sacrifice was very costly. The choice was between the Lord and his dearest earthly tie. Jephthah properly made the choice *for the Lord*. Accordingly, he is mentioned by name in Hebrews 11:32 as an Ancient Worthy.

The Scriptures do not tell much about Jephthah's personal life, but we certainly see his spirit and the spirit of his daughter. They were a religious family. The fact that he could recount the history of Moses when the Israelites left Egypt shows he revered God and thought on these things.

Comment: It is touching, too, that the daughters of Israel lamented four days each year for Jephthah's daughter, bewailing her virginity.

Reply: Yes. The custom, which was a memorial of her sacrifice, would have lasted for her lifetime. The women back there wanted to have a son, for they were always hoping the son would be the Messiah. Genesis 3:15 indicated he would be born of a woman.

As we read the Old Testament, it helps to picture ourselves as the individual who is being commended. That way, for example, we feel the emotions of Jephthah's daughter and realize what the sacrifice cost her and her father. Not only was her sacrifice meritorious, but she very willingly acquiesced to her father's vow even before she knew what it was. Then, upon hearing the details of the vow, she asked for the two months.

Judges 12:1 **And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.**

Comment: The Ephraimites had spoken similarly to Gideon earlier. "Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites?" (Judg. 8:1). They were angry for not being included in the battle, yet they were not responsive *before* they saw it would result in a victory. Gideon showed that their attitude was wrong in wanting to share in the glory. Obviously, the men of Ephraim had not learned the lesson from the

previous experience. Now they were angry over not being included in the successful battle with the Ammonites.

Judges 12:2 And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.

Judges 12:3 And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?

Not only were the Ephraimites disgruntled, but also they threatened to burn Jephthah's house with fire. Jephthah pointed out that they had no reason to be angry. Earlier they had refused to help him, and he had risked his life in the battle with the Ammonites.

Judges 12:4 Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

Apparently, there was a long-standing grudge because Jephthah “gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim.” Originally half the tribe of Manasseh had inherited property east of Jordan in Gilead, and evidently later on, some of the people of Ephraim had infiltrated Gilead because of its rich soil. Now Israel was fighting Israel in fratricidal warfare.

Judges 12:5 And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

Judges 12:6 Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

Judges 12:7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

The battle was fought in Gilead. When the Ephraimites saw that they were losing, they tried to escape back to their home territory. However, the Gileadites had captured the fords of the Jordan River, so when an Ephraimite tried to cross, he was asked to pronounce the word “Shibboleth.” Of course the individual denied he was an Ephraimite, but his pronunciation of the word as “Sibboleth”—that is, without the first “h”—betrayed his identity and he was slain. In all, 42,000 Ephraimites died.

Jephthah judged Israel for six years, and he was an Ancient Worthy, even though he fought against his own people. The war was justified because it was one of *self*-defense, for the Ephraimites wanted to burn his house down and inflict punishment on the Gileadites.

Judges 12:8 And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

Judges 12:9 And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

Judges 12:10 Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

Ibzan judged Israel for seven years. The word “abroad” means that he sent his 30 daughters to

another “clan” (see RSV and NIV).

Judges 12:11 And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years.

Judges 12:12 And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

Elon judged Israel for ten years, and he was of the tribe of Zebulun.

Judges 12:13 And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel.

Judges 12:14 And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years.

Judges 12:15 And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

Abdon judged Israel for eight years. Starting with Gideon, a number of the judges had many sons and daughters. Thus there was an emphasis on multiplication.

Notice that Abdon’s 40 sons and 30 nephews rode on 70 asses. The implication is that there was a subdivision of authority into 70 areas of jurisdiction. This practice, which existed throughout Israel’s history, was based on the appointment of 70 men to assist Moses in judging Israel while the nation was in the desert of Sinai.

Q: What is the significance of the asses?

A: The ass that a judge rode became a badge of his authority. The purpose for inserting this information about the asses may have been to acquaint us with the significance of Jesus’ riding on an ass when he entered the Holy City. Usually a white ass of very good quality was chosen, so when the people saw a white ass approaching in the distance, they knew that a judge was coming (or, in this case, one of the “subjudges” who was assisting Abdon, the head judge).

At this point, the account is just giving us the continuity of the names and years of the judges between Jephthah and Samson, both of whom were Ancient Worthies (Heb. 11:32). Only minimal information is given about the less significant judges, but the continuity and years of their judgeships are important in the understanding of chronology. By adding the years of judgeship and servitude in the Book of Judges, we come close to 450 years. This number is meaningful because it disproves the theory that the Period of the Judges was only 350 years. Moreover, this number is verified in Acts 13:20, which reads, “And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.”

Judges 13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

The Israelites were under bondage to the Philistines for 40 years because they “did evil again in the sight of the LORD.”

Judges 13:2 And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

Judges 13:3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her,

Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

Judges 13:4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

Judges 13:5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

Notice that the name of the husband is given but not the name of his wife, yet the angel of God appeared to *her* and not to Manoah. (Similarly in the New Testament, the angel first appeared to Mary.) The suggestion is that the woman was more religious, although Manoah was recognized later, and his name means “rest.”

The angel gave the barren woman quite a lot of information. He told her that she would have a son and that he was to be dedicated to the Lord “from the womb”—that is, from birth, which was before the child could responsibly take that vow on his own. In other words, as an infant, he was trained to be a Nazarite for life. (A Nazarite vow could last for a few weeks, a few months, a few years, or a lifetime depending on the length of time that was specified when it was made.) According to this Nazarite vow, the child, from birth, could not drink any alcoholic beverage or eat anything unclean, nor could his hair be cut. Therefore, special care had to be taken in the feeding, training, and development of this child. Incidentally, in many foreign countries, alcoholic beverages are given to little children for various reasons such as to substitute for impure drinking water or to fight off disease. The woman, too, had to observe certain restrictions, for during her pregnancy, she could eat nothing unclean or drink any alcoholic beverage.

In summary, the mother’s responsibility was to see that the child was not predisposed to any unlawful food or beverage and that his hair would not be cut. These were important restrictions because he was to be a Nazarite from the womb; that is, he was to be dedicated to God in a special sense from birth until the day of his death.

“And he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.” This information tells us that the story of Samson—his birth through his various exploits—had its setting *within* the 40 years mentioned in verse 1. In other words, Samson was raised *during* the 40-year period of the Philistine captivity of Israel, and the captivity ended when he pulled down the pillars of the house of Dagon, killing the Philistine lords and notables and thousands of people. In effect, Samson was like a *one-man army*. He inflicted a very grievous wound on the enemy.

Thus, in talking to the woman, the angel gave a prophecy. He told of her responsibility, but he also prophesied what the child would ultimately do with regard to Israel’s deliverance.

Comment: The term “from the womb” is significant. Those who believe the fetus is a viable being prior to birth try to use this expression as a proof, but that reasoning would not make sense here. The context tells that a razor was not to cut his hair, but that restriction would be impossible to enforce until the child had *left* the womb.

Reply: Yes, “from the womb” is a colloquialism meaning “from birth” (see the RSV). God had to breathe into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life for him to become a *living soul* (Gen. 2:7).

Judges 13:6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name:

Judges 13:7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

The woman repeated the angel's message to her husband. Neither she nor the child could drink alcoholic beverages or eat unclean foods. She would have to be very careful during her pregnancy and the rearing of the child. She accepted the responsibility for these restrictions.

Comment: She described the “man of God” as having a countenance like that of an angel of God, so apparently, she did not yet realize he truly was an angel.

Reply: He was like an angel with an unusual countenance—perhaps majestic or awesome—but she did not ask his name, and he did not volunteer to tell her.

Judges 13:8 Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

Judges 13:9 And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her.

Judges 13:10 And the woman made haste, and ran, and showed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day.

Judges 13:11 And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am.

Judges 13:12 And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?

As the head of the house, Manoah did the proper thing in going to the Lord in prayer, but once again the angel appeared to his wife. No doubt she said, “Do not go away,” and then ran to get her husband so that he could talk to the “man of God.”

When Manoah arrived, he was impressed with the angel. However, he still was not sure this individual was an angel. He may have thought, “Perhaps he is a prophet, a seer,” for some men had the gift of prophecy whereby they could predict events. Some of these men even had a regal bearing. So Manoah was not certain, but he felt that the appearance of the angel was extraordinary.

Manoah showed a submissive attitude: “Now let thy words come to pass.” Then he asked for advice, even though the woman had explicitly told him what the angel had said. “How shall we order the child? What shall we do?”

Judges 13:13 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.

Judges 13:14 She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe.

The angel repeated to Manoah what he had earlier told the woman.

Judges 13:15 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.

Judges 13:16 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD.

Wanting to be hospitable, Manoah properly offered food to the angel, who responded, “Though you detain me, I will not eat of your bread, and if you prepare a burnt offering, you must offer it to Jehovah.” Thus the angel declined food for himself but suggested a burnt offering to God. At this point, the words still could have been those of a prophet.

Sometimes angels did eat food, but here the angel had another purpose; namely, he wanted to ascend miraculously in the flame. Fire is a symbol of acceptance, as shown with the example of Gideon when a fire burned the meat and the unleavened cakes that the angel touched with his staff. Here is another way we are educated from Scripture, for we see that fire pictures acceptance.

Q: Was this angel the Logos?

A: The angel may well have been the Logos, especially since Gabriel gave his name on other occasions and this angel remained nameless.

It took time to prepare and eat a meal, whereas to prepare a burnt offering would have been much quicker, for the animal just needed to be skinned. A fire was then made, and the animal was burnt whole on the altar. Thus the angel did not want to be detained for a meal, but he implied he would stay for the burnt offering.

Judges 13:17 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?

Judges 13:18 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?

Judges 13:19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

Judges 13:20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.

Judges 13:21 But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD.

When Manoah asked the angel his name, the reply was, “Why do you ask after my name, seeing it is secret?” The angel had intentionally withheld this information, for the purpose of the burnt offering was to honor *God*, not himself. Manoah was saying, “If indeed this event comes to pass and my wife has a son, we want to know your name so that we can honor you.” Therefore, the angel answered in effect, “Don’t you see the impropriety of what you are asking?” Manoah then offered unto Jehovah “a kid with a meat [meal] offering ... upon a rock,” and “the angel did wondrously” by ascending out of sight “in the flame of the altar.”

Comment: For verse 19, the Revised Standard Version reads, “So Manoah took the kid with the

cereal offering, and offered it upon the rock to the LORD, to him who works wonders.”

Reply: We think the King James rendering is correct, although the fact that the words “the angel” are not in the Hebrew allows the RSV to give that interpretation. However, verse 20 describes the wondrous act that the angel performed in the sight of Manoah and his wife, namely, his ascension in the flame.

The miraculous ascension convinced Manoah and his wife that the personage they had seen in human form was an angel, a materialized spirit being. Now he had dematerialized in the flame and disappeared out of sight. Manoah and his wife “fell on their faces to the ground.” The angel did not appear anymore to them.

Q: Does this incident prove that spirit beings are not affected by either cold or heat?

A: Yes. Not only are they impervious to such sensations, but also they cannot be harmed by human weapons.

Judges 13:22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

Judges 13:23 But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shown us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.

Manoah then said, “We shall surely die, because we have seen a god.” (This is a corrected translation, for surely Manoah did not think he had seen the Almighty God.) But Manoah’s wife had faith and used common-sense reasoning, saying in effect, “If God had wanted to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering from us or have told us we would have a son.” Manoah was devout, but he did not rationalize as clearly as his wife did in connection with this experience.

Q: Is the thought in verse 22 “a messenger of the God”?

A: Yes. Similarly in John 1:1, the Greek makes a distinction between God (*ho theos*) and Jesus (*theos*, that is, a god). Here in verse 22, the Hebrew word *elohim*, meaning “mighty one,” is used. Even judges were sometimes called *elohim*, and they were human beings. The title *elohim* has a broad implication depending on context.

Judges 13:24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

Comment: According to Young’s *Analytical Concordance*, Samson means “distinguished” and “strong,” so the name was probably chosen because of what the angel had told the parents.

Samson grew and the Lord blessed him. It would be interesting to know how God blessed him, but the account is silent except to say that he began to do exploits early in life. Some very favorable things happened in connection with Samson, and it seems that his family was blessed with a reflected favor because he was in their custodianship.

Judges 13:25 And the spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Originally the tribe of Dan was in southern Israel. Later on in history, in the Period of the

Kings, the territory Dan occupied was too limited, so the people ended up in the north near Lebanon. At that time, Israel extended from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south.

Zorah and Eshtaol were generally in the Gaza region, where the Philistines dwelled. Samson did wondrous exploits in this area. At times the “spirit of the LORD” came on him suddenly. For example, if there was special oppression in that region, he was suddenly strengthened in his righteous indignation as the Lord’s Spirit came over him and made him like a regiment.

Judges 14:1 And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

Judges 14:2 And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.

Judges 14:3 Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

Judges 14:4 But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

Samson desired to have a *Philistine* woman for his wife. The Philistines were not one of the seven forbidden peoples (such as the Amorites, the Hittites, and the Perizzites), nor were they of the forbidden ten in Genesis 15:19-21, which included some of the same peoples (Deut. 7:1).

Comment: Amos 9:7 shows that God had once dealt with the Philistines, for He had brought them up from Caphtor.

Reply: Yes, the Lord dealt with them in some manner prior to the setting here with Samson.

The last chapter ended with a statement about Samson’s birth and said that he grew and that the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times (Judg. 13:24,25). A big time gap followed, for at the start of chapter 14, Samson was an adult. There is no personal history of him up to this point, and now he was at least 20 years old, so we are brought abruptly into his life as an adult.

Unbeknownst to Samson’s father and mother, the situation “was of the LORD,” for He sought an occasion against the Philistines because they had dominion over Israel at that time. Perhaps God had even instructed Samson to marry a Philistine woman. The reason for going a little out of our way to explain some of these things is that Samson is listed by name as one of the Ancient Worthies, so we know he was approved of God. In reading about his life, we get a different slant because the account focuses on certain incidents for their typical value. As much as possible, we will consider the complex study of the types as we proceed. After all, didn’t God instruct Hosea to marry a harlot, and other prophets had to do unusual things (Hos. 1:2). In each case, God had a reason for requiring acts that were above the Law.

At the present time, God wanted to stir up the situation with the Philistines, for the Israelites were in servitude to them for 40 years (Judg. 13:1). Later on, the Book of Judges tells that Samson judged Israel for 20 years, and those 20 years ended with his death in pulling down the two pillars of the temple and killing 3,000 of the Philistine leadership (Judg. 15:20). That incident marked the beginning of Israel’s breaking the yoke of Philistine bondage. In other words, the 20 years of Samson’s judgeship were the last 20 years of the 40 years of Philistine oppression. Subsequently—that is, after Samson broke the back of the prime Philistine leadership—new

leadership and conditions arose in Israel that effectually broke the servitude. As we read the entire account of Samson, we will see that he judged in a limited capacity and in a relatively small area within the framework of the Philistine servitude.

Of the Timnath woman of the daughters of the Philistines, Samson said to his parents, “Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.” The Hebrew is, “She is right in mine eyes” (see KJV margin). The main point was not necessarily an amorous attraction, for the thought seems to be, “It is all right,” and Samson did not explain his motivation in seeking this particular woman for a wife. In fact, there are several things in his life that he did not explain to his parents; for example, he did not tell them about his rending a lion (verses 5 and 6). It is interesting to observe that Samson was selected and named as an Ancient Worthy in Hebrews 11 when other individuals in the Old Testament who seemed to be of more sterling quality are not named. However, Samson did show good qualities—and even here, for in seeking the approval of his parents, particularly his father, he was obedient in spite of his great prowess.

Q: Wasn't an Israelite supposed to marry within his own tribe?

A: Yes, but there were exceptions where God Himself told individuals to do otherwise. Matters are sometimes presented in Scripture with great brevity as a test to us. For instance, Jesus said, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (John 6:53). Because of this difficult saying, many disciples left him but not the apostles. When Jesus asked if they, too, would go away, Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou [only] hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68,69). The Twelve were in a dilemma, for they could not understand his statement, which was against their training as Jews, but they had enough familiarity with Jesus to *trust* him. Of course Jesus was speaking in a spiritual sense, but the apostles did not know that. And with us also, sometimes we are faced with decisions in life where we have to weigh matters and not necessarily let a *specific* incident unsettle our whole faith in an individual. The point is to back off and weigh things so that we will not act too precipitously, unless, of course, we can definitely see the impropriety.

Comment: Since the end of chapter 13 said of Samson, “The spirit of the LORD began to move him at times,” it may have been obvious to the parents that God was working with him. Thus when he insisted on a matter, they trusted his judgment.

Reply: Yes. It was said of Jesus, before his formal ministry began, that he “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”; that is, the favor and blessing bestowed on him as a youth were apparent to others (Luke 2:52). Samson “grew” similarly (Judg. 13:24).

At any rate, the Lord had probably directed Samson to seek this Philistine woman as a wife. And even if Samson's desire is hard for us to accept, we should be encouraged because “it was of the Lord,” nevertheless. There was something behind this incident. Knowing the end from the beginning, God could see ahead and knew what would develop subsequently.

Judges 14:5 Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

Judges 14:6 And the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

Samson killed a young lion with his bare hands. Earlier the Spirit of the Lord had enabled him to do sporadic notable, almost supernatural, *public* exploits (Judg. 13:25). This time he kept the

matter private and did not tell his parents. We think it was part of Samson's nature to keep some things to himself.

Comment: No one knew about the killing of the lion until Samson told the woman from Timnath in connection with a riddle he made about the animal. Therefore, this detail about his keeping the killing of the lion secret was important.

Reply: Yes, that detail was added for our benefit, for at the time of the lion's death, Samson did not know he would make a riddle.

David, too, killed a lion (and also a bear) with his bare hands (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Some artists should adjust their pictures because they show David as a stripling lad of 14 or 15 years of age going out to slay Goliath. At that time, David was so big in stature that he could have worn King Saul's armor. However, he declined the offer because the armor was clumsy and he was not used to it. Saul was the tallest man in the whole camp of Israel, for he stood head and shoulders above everyone else (1 Sam. 9:2). Therefore, for him to offer David his armor means that the latter was also tall. The problem was that David was unskilled in the use and manipulation of armor because he had never worn it. Hence he trusted in his slingshot and his bare hands. The Lord made David's arms like bands of iron for the killing of Goliath.

Judges 14:7 And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

Samson probably went on ahead of his parents as they neared Timnath. Then, on the way to seeing the woman, he saw the lion when he was alone. Samson was pleased with the woman.

Judges 14:8 And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.

Judges 14:9 And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

Comment: There was a time lapse in order for the carcass to be left and bees to build a nest in it.

Reply: Yes. In making honey, bees seek nectar from plants, fruit, etc., with *sweet* fragrances. Therefore, the carcass would have been repugnant if the odor of decaying meat still clung to it. The sensory organs of bees are so powerful that they can smell a certain fruit up to two miles away.

Samson took honey with his hands; that is, he took the comb, which contained the honey. He ate first and then took the honeycomb to his parents, but he did not tell about the lion carcass.

Procuring the honey shows that Samson had outdoor savvy. Many mistakenly think that he was crude and unintelligent and that he was a man of few words with little subtlety and wisdom. However, that was not the case.

Judges 14:10 So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.

Judges 14:11 And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

Samson prepared a seven-day feast, as was customary for the bridegroom to do. In connection

with the festive occasion of the marriage, the Philistines brought 30 companions to assist him in preparing the feast. During the seven days, a certain rapport usually developed between the bridegroom and his companions.

Judges 14:12 And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments:

Judges 14:13 But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.

Judges 14:14 And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.

Samson said unto the 30 companions, "I will now put forth a riddle unto you." But first, he issued a challenge to the 30 men that consisted of 30 ordinary shirts and 30 festive shirts, or garments. If they could not solve the riddle, they had to give two garments apiece (a total of 60 garments) to Samson. If Samson lost, he had to give two garments to each of the men (a total of 60). With tremendous odds against Samson, the companions accepted the challenge, for they considered it to be in their favor.

Then Samson propounded the riddle. "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." In three days, the companions could not solve the riddle. It was more difficult than they had expected, and only four days remained to solve it. Therefore, the 30 companions decided to pressure Samson's wife to get the answer. They reasoned, "Since she is one of our kin, we can pressure her to find out the secret of the riddle."

Judges 14:15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? is it not so?

Judges 14:16 And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee?

Judges 14:17 And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.

Judges 14:18 And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.

The 30 companions threatened to burn Samson's wife and her father's house with fire if she did not get the information for them. Considering Samson shrewd, they accused her of being in cahoots with him to get a big dowry. They asked her, "Are you involved with this strategy? Did the two of you trick us into making a promise that would defraud us?" She wept out of fear plus her desire to get the answer from Samson, for she realized as each day passed that her fate was getting closer. Finally, on the seventh day, he revealed the secret, and she transferred the information to the 30 companions, who gave the correct answer to Samson. They answered the riddle with a riddle: "What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?" Samson knew the information had come from his wife, because she was the *only* other person

who had the answer. He replied, “If ye had not plowed with my heifer [my wife], ye had not found out my riddle.” (A heifer is a young cow, especially one that has not had a calf.) In other words, the 30 had dug up the secret through his wife. Samson got angry (verse 19).

Q: The days are confusing in the King James Version. If Samson’s wife cried for seven days, then when did the 30 companions start to pressure her?

A: Three days expired, and on the fourth day, the 30 men approached her. Therefore, she wept for the remaining four days. Based partly on the Septuagint, the RSV and the NIV corrected the beginning of verse 15 to say, “On the *fourth* day.” In other words, of the seven-day feast, the 30 companions went to Samson’s wife on the fourth day to pressure her to get the answer from Samson. (They had tried in vain to come up with the answer for the first three days.) She then wept for the remainder of the seven days. On the seventh day, Samson told her, and she gave the answer to the 30 men.

In Biblical Hebrew, the account was frequently stated in a backward fashion. The Apostle Paul also did this in some of his reasoning. His logic is very powerful, but it differs from our Western thinking. His reasoning seems to be so orderly, and then, all of a sudden, it is exactly the opposite. But that is because we are not accustomed in our thinking to look at a matter one way and then look at it another way. Instead everything is sequential in our thinking and in the schools. Since we live in the Western world, we have to think as a Westerner in order to be intelligent, to pass exams, etc., but the thinking of other nationalities is often quite different because it is from a different perspective.

If the King James rendering is retained, verse 15 would be explained as follows. Instead of the 30 men coming to Samson’s wife on the seventh day, the thought is that they had *previously* pressured Samson’s wife, but they had not gotten the information they wanted. On the seventh day, therefore, they pressured her even further, saying, “This is it. If you do not divulge the information now, we will burn you and your father’s house with fire.” She then put correspondingly increased pressure on Samson until he could not stand her nagging anymore, and he told her. As for the weeping, the implication is that after three days, the 30 men, knowing they could not solve the riddle, began to pressure Samson’s wife, and at that point, she began to weep.

Judges 14:19 And the spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father’s house.

Judges 14:20 But Samson’s wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

Of course Samson never dreamed the 30 men would solve the riddle, so what would he do now? From what is stated in verse 4, the Lord evidently wanted a legitimate occasion to occur so that Samson would slay Philistines. There are a lot of nuances here that are not revealed. Who knows but that Samson was somewhat of an introvert? Perhaps he was quiet by nature, keeping to himself, and did not want to be aggressive, even though he possessed “armor” for warfare. Hence this incident with the riddle was the needed provocation for him to slay. Where would he get the 60 garments? Surely he would not go out and pay for them. Therefore, when “the spirit of the LORD came upon him,” he went to Ashkelon, killed 30 men, took the spoil, and gave 60 garments to the 30 men back in Timnath. Then he returned to his father’s house.

Samson was beginning to establish a reputation. However, unbeknownst to him, his wife was given to his companion, “the friend who had attended him at his wedding” (NIV).

Now we will review this chapter from the standpoint of the antitype. What do the carcass (the slain lion), the honey, the bees, and the riddle represent? This notable incident establishes certain principles. First, the riddle establishes the principle of the *permission of evil*. Samson represents Jesus, who will slay Satan, the lion. Out of the permission of evil—that is, out of the destroyer, the eater, Satan—will come forth sweetness. Satan goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). As a result of the permission of evil and the final destruction of the Adversary, the beautiful sweetness and fragrance of peace will come forth, particularly at the end of the Kingdom Age. In the age beyond the Millennium, there will be no more death. Satan, the young and strong lion, is not like Adam, who, having the penalty of death on him, deteriorated physically as time went on. Finally he died and went into the tomb, but as far as we know, Satan has retained his personal vigor right up to the present day. Superior strength was needed to imprison him in *tartaroo*.

Strange as it seems, the permission of evil is a paradox, or *riddle*, to the world. The question is, Why does God permit evil? The answer to the riddle, when seen in its fullness, can be stated as follows. As the result of the *temporary* permission of evil, blessings will come forth—particularly in the unending age beyond the Kingdom. In the recording of this first incident, we think the Holy Spirit intentionally suppressed some of the details lest the antitype be marred by too much information. The lesson is that out of the mouth of the eater comes forth sweetness. God will make not only the wrath of man to praise Him but also the wrath of Satan.

The seven-day feast represents the 7,000 years of the Seventh Creative Day. The permission of evil commenced with the beginning of the Seventh Creative Day, and it will end with the termination of that day. Stated another way, the permission of evil began in the evening when Adam sinned, and it will end in the morning when it will be light. That morning will not come until the end of the Kingdom Age, which will coincide with the end of the 7,000 years.

There may be an antitype for the 30 changes of garment, but we do not have an application at this time. Also, we would exclude Samson's wife in the antitype. In other words, in order for this incident to be a real-life drama, the stage had to be set, but the focus in the antitype is the riddle. Why does God permit evil? Why did He allow the Adversary to tempt Adam? Why didn't God intervene when angels materialized prior to the Flood? There are reasons.

Judges 15:1 But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

Judges 15:2 And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her.

Why did Samson's father-in-law say to him, "I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her"? Earlier Samson's wife had enticed him for the answer to the riddle and then told it to the Philistines. Therefore, since Samson had lost the challenge in connection with the riddle, he killed 30 Philistines to get garments to give to the 30 men who had threatened to kill his wife and burn her father's house if she did not provide the answer to the riddle. Now a little time had passed, and Samson returned for his wife. In the meantime, however, her father, thinking Samson would remain angry, had given her to one of the 30 companions as a wife.

Comment: Even though his wife had betrayed him, Samson was now taking a present to her. The goat indicated that he had forgiven her. Here is an insight into his character.

Reply: Apparently, he made an allowance because she had been pressured by her own people.

Judges 15:3 And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

Because his father-in-law had given his wife to another, Samson sought retribution.

Judges 15:4 And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

Judges 15:5 And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.

With regard to an antitype at the end of the age, the mention of the “wheat harvest” in verse 1 and the 300 foxes reminds us of Gideon and his 300 men. The end-of-the-age types almost invariably, in one form or another, have at least two or three witnesses to assure us in connection with the interpretation. In this particular picture, Samson represents Jesus, and the 300 foxes picture the feet members. If this incident is a confirmation of the Gideon picture, then Samson’s setting the foxes’ tails on fire shows that the feet members will be filled with *zeal*. The Holy Spirit will energize them.

Comment: In addition, with the tails being the *end* of the foxes, the signification is the feet members, the *last* of the body of Christ, at the *end* of the age.

Q: With Gideon, a lot of emphasis was put on the fact that there were three bands of 100 each. Here the 300 were divided by 2, for the foxes were sent forth in *pairs*. Does this method indicate there could be some pairing among the feet members, that is, among the antitypical three bands of 100 each? Will two together go out and do a zealous work?

A: Yes. In fact, that is the way the 70 were sent out during Jesus’ ministry. To go out in twos is a good principle, where possible, because one helps the other in giving a witness, especially in a time of danger. Companionship in trouble can greatly increase courage.

The foxes were sent forth into the Philistines’ “standing corn.” “Corn,” or grain, is fodder for animals as well as food for humans. Hence in the antitype, an inroad will be made into mystic Babylon’s “larder”; that is, there will be a *doctrinal* invasion into the nominal system and especially to those in Babylon who are interested in Scripture.

From a natural standpoint, the paired foxes were tied tail to tail, their tails were set on fire, and they were let loose to run helter-skelter through the corn, vineyards, and olive trees. First, one fox dragged in one direction, but as soon as he slackened a little, the other fox dragged in another direction. Therefore, the small number of foxes was very effective in creating a tremendous conflagration. We can imagine the havoc that was produced, whereas if Samson had used single foxes, they would have run straight through the field, exited, and gone somewhere else. Being tied tail to tail, the foxes were rather limited in their scope in one sense, so Samson kept loosing them as he went along, proceeding from area to area.

Comment: It was not an easy task to round up 300 foxes, so some time would have been involved.

Reply: Evidently, Samson was knowledgeable in regard to nature, as evidenced by his slaying a lion bare-handed and later observing bees in its carcass and eating the honey with his hands.

He was almost like a John the Baptist type. Not only was he strong, but he was used to living off the land.

Comment: Samson could have temporarily put the 300 foxes in a den.

Reply: That is true, but even to catch 300 was a feat. Contrary to what many believe, Samson was not just all brute strength and lacking in intellect. He was intelligent, and he used ingenuity; his riddle was clever too.

Judges 15:6 Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

Of course the Philistines blamed Samson, but they also hearkened back to his father-in-law. Burning, the *very thing* that had been threatened earlier to Samson's wife and the house of his father-in-law when the Philistines wanted to learn the secret of Samson's riddle, was the punishment now enacted (Judg. 14:15). Samson's act was clearly retribution.

Judges 15:7 And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.

Judges 15:8 And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

Samson punished the Philistines a second time because they had burned his wife and her father. And he smote the Philistines "with a *great* slaughter." Notice that there is no mention of a weapon. Hence the thought is that he pummeled them violently with his body movements. Then Samson went down and dwelled on the top of the rock of Etam. Why did he go there?

Comment: The top of the rock was a good vantage point to see if anyone was pursuing him. In addition, he may have wanted to pray to the Lord.

Comment: The RSV states that Samson "stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam," and the NIV tells that he "stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam."

Reply: We believe the King James rendering is more accurate.

Judges 15:9 Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.

Judges 15:10 And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us.

Judges 15:11 Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.

Judges 15:12 And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves.

Judges 15:13 And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new

ords, and brought him up from the rock.

As a result of this second slaughter, the Philistines gathered together a military force and went up to Judah and started to assemble themselves for a siege. They wanted to make Judah sorry for what Samson had done.

When the men of Judah inquired as to why the Philistines were coming up against them, the reply was, “To bind Samson ... , to do to him as he hath done to us.” Then the men of Judah went to the top of the rock of Etam to apprehend Samson, but in doing so, they took the precaution of having 3,000 men. Imagine 3,000 men went to seize *one* man! Obviously, they had great respect for Samson’s strength.

When the men of Judah promised not to slay Samson themselves, he agreed to submit to them and to be led captive and delivered, bound, unto the Philistines. (Samson did not want to kill his own people.) Then the men of Judah bound Samson with two “new cords,” which had greater tensile strength than old ones.

Comment: The cowardice of the men of Judah puts them to shame. They lacked the faith to realize that the Lord was leading Samson and that He would protect them if they supported him.

Reply: It took quite a while for that lesson to sink in.

Notice that the Philistines spread themselves in Lehi, which means “jawbone” (verse 9). In other words, *after* Samson slew the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (verse 15), the place was named Lehi, and the incident was recorded by a historian.

Judges 15:14 And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

Judges 15:15 And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

Judges 15:16 And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

Judges 15:17 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.

The cords were of no avail when “the spirit of the LORD” came mightily upon Samson. The cords became as flax burned with fire, and Samson was free. Nearby he picked up the jawbone of a freshly slain ass and used it to create another slaughter—this time killing 1,000 men. Up to now, this was the greatest number of Philistines that Samson slaughtered on one occasion.

Q: Does the jawbone of the ass picture a very simple people—that is, the feet members—giving a message in the antitype?

A: Yes, the feet members are pictured. Those of the world consider true Christians simple, unlearned, naive, and foolish to believe in the Bible. Such individuals do not realize they are deriding Almighty God, the Author of the Bible. The jawbone of a horse, or an ass, is heavy, and it is one of the strongest parts of the animal. Thus it is something like a scythe but with a rough edge that can decapitate people if it is swung around. In this incident, Samson represents

an element within Babylon that will be enlightened by the message of the feet members.

When the slaughter was complete, Samson cast away the jawbone and called the place Ramath-lehi, which means “the hill of the jawbone.” In the type, the slaughter was literal, but along another line, there is also a figurative beheading. In the latter case, one is beheaded for Christ by losing his own head and replacing it with the Lord’s head. Revelation 20:4 talks of the “souls of them that were *beheaded* for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands.” In addition, “beheading” is sometimes a symbol of martyrdom.

Judges 15:18 And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

Judges 15:19 But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.

“En,” as in En-hakkore or En-gedi, is an abbreviation that can mean a spring or a well. Thus the meaning of En-hakkore is “the well of him that is called.” Because of the great energy that was expended, Samson was dehydrated after the slaughter and needed moisture to regain his strength. Since moisture from the jawbone revived him, the place was named En-hakkore in a figurative sense.

The King James Version says that God provided water in the hollow of the jawbone itself, and that is probably the correct thought, for the jawbone was “new,” that is, freshly slain. In the antitype, the water being in the jawbone represents the message of the feet members. While the feet members will enunciate a message, they will be small in number. Therefore, other circumstances will cause the great havoc that will ensue; that is, the masses within the nominal Church itself will rise up and destroy the system when they see the corruption. Stated another way, Babylon will be destroyed by much of its own membership. The Jehu picture shows this, and so do the dogs with Jezebel (2 Kings 9:1–10:28).

Comment: In a future events study in the past, it was pointed out that the jawbone of a *freshly slain* animal meant the feet members had just been put to death, but the effects of their message lingered and activated a now enlightened (but unconsecrated) element in Babylon.

Reply: The message of the feet members will energize, or rejuvenate, the masses in Babylon. This picture will be seen a little more clearly when we consider the next chapter. As a guideline, each incident with Samson is a *separate* picture, or type, and that is generally true with other types as well. For example, Samson and Moses have different representations in different pictures. Two exceptions are the types of Elijah and Jesus’ last week, which have consistent representations throughout.

Judges 15:20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

If we compare this verse with Judges 13:1 and 16:31, two time periods are mentioned: 20 years and 40 years. As stated earlier, the 20 years that Samson judged Israel were within the 40-year period of Philistine oppression; specifically, they were the last 20 years of that oppression. We cannot know for sure, but Samson was probably born before the Philistine servitude began. Then he would have matured during the first 20 years of the servitude, and he judged during the last 20 years. The account does not state how old Samson was when he began to judge.

Judges 16:1 Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

Verse 1 is incriminating in that it says Samson had relations with a harlot in Gaza. However, whether or not he realized she was a harlot we do not know for sure.

Judges 16:2 And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.

Judges 16:3 And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron.

Verse 2 does not provide any moderating explanation. Perhaps the Philistines knew Samson was in the vicinity and used this woman as bait in a trap. Certainly the Philistines were aware that Samson had lost his wife. The point is that there can be mitigating circumstances which are not recorded.

Comment: Samson went right into the stronghold of the Philistines, for Gaza was one of their chief cities. Surely he knew he would be recognized because of his unusual appearance with long, uncut hair. Moreover, he must have realized they were trying to apprehend him, for otherwise, why would he have taken the doors of the gate of the city?

Comment: Since it was brazen of Samson to go to Gaza, he must have felt very secure in his strength, knowing he could escape.

Reply: Or he may have thought the Philistines would be so frightened and intimidated that a lot of caution was not necessary. Gaza and the Gaza Strip exist even today. There may be a picture here that we are not aware of.

Of course people back there did not have the type of weapons that are available in our day. All fighting in ancient times was hand-to-hand combat, so we can see how Samson might have felt secure. Today a very short man with a gun can easily subdue an unarmed tall brute of a man.

Thus the Philistines laid a trap, thinking that in the morning they would close in and capture Samson. However, he arose at midnight and took the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts and carried them away on his shoulders, bar and all. Moreover, he took the heavy doors to the top of a hill. This incident shows that Samson had a little wry sense of humor, just as he did earlier with the riddle. Taking the doors, etc., up to the top of the hill and leaving them there was almost like a prank. Samson's act made a mockery of what the Philistines had intended to do to him. The strength needed to carry all that weight is almost unbelievable. The hill where he went was "before Hebron"; that is, it was on the west side of Hebron.

Comment: The Philistines, who were in close proximity to the city gate, must have been in a deep sleep so that they would not hear the commotion when Samson took the doors.

Reply: The account does not so state, but that could be. If the Bible went into all the details, it would be far larger than *Merriam's Unabridged Dictionary*.

Of course the moral standard in Old Testament times was completely different than it is for a Christian. Therefore, a Christian cannot look back at David and Samson, for example, and think, "If the Lord forgave them, He will also forgive me." We cannot use David's sin with Bath-sheba as justification that we can sin so that grace will abound (Rom. 6:1,2). As Christians,

we are in a race for the highest of all life—immortality, the crown of life, to live in God’s immediate presence, to have a reward that, by comparison, makes any other reward insignificant. Hence while we need to have the same faith as the Ancient Worthies, the qualifications, rules, and standards for the Little Flock are higher, so we cannot do certain things that they did. For instance, Abraham was told to slay his son Isaac.

Comment: Another example is that Christians are not to kill in warfare. Our weapons are not carnal.

Judges 16:4 And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Judges 16:5 And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.

Judges 16:6 And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

Judges 16:7 And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

Judges 16:8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

Judges 16:9 Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.

The Philistine lords *each* offered Delilah 1,100 pieces of silver to learn and then tell them the secret of Samson’s strength (see the RSV and the NIV). That was a *great* fortune, which Delilah could not turn down.

When the Philistine lords lay in wait and Delilah said to Samson, “The Philistines be upon thee,” he was not aware of their presence. Samson broke the “seven green withs,” whereby he was bound, as a “thread of tow” is broken when it touches the fire. The green withs were strands woven together somewhat like hemp. Basically, they were extremely fine branches, but they were so small, young, and stringy that a rope was made out of them. Because they were freshly cut, the strands were twisted or braided, and they were exceedingly strong.

Comment: Young’s *Analytical Concordance* defines “tow” as flax.

Delilah was testing Samson to see if he had told the truth. If he had indeed revealed the secret of his strength, the Philistines would have come forth and captured him. She tested him repeatedly while they lay in wait out of sight. Obviously, if Samson had seen the Philistines, he would have known Delilah was in on a plot—and he would not have eventually told her the truth. The statement in verse 9 that Samson’s “strength was not known” means that the secret, or source, of his strength was not learned through Delilah’s first attempt.

With Delilah, money was the enticement. She was not just asking innocent questions out of curiosity. With his wife earlier, the reason for betrayal was fear and family ties (Judg. 14:15).

In all, there would be four tests, and in three of the four, the number “seven” was mentioned: “seven green withs” and then twice “seven locks” of hair (verses 7, 13, and 19). “Seven” is a picture of completeness, so Samson used the number from a figurative standpoint, implying that “seven” would (supposedly) diminish his great strength.

In each of the first three tests, Samson was confident of his strength, even though he had probably not previously broken seven withs or locks. Rather, he was experiencing these situations for the first time—just as we do not think he had taken doors of other city gates prior to the incident in Gaza. The doors would have been locked, preventing his leaving the city. In anger, he lifted them up and carried them away with the strength the Lord gave him.

Comment: It sounds strange that a human being could have such strength, but at the First Advent, Jesus cast demons out of a man who could break chains that bound him (Mark 5:1-5; Luke 8:26-33).

Reply: The Scriptures tell of counterparts of Samson’s supernatural strength. In a bad sense, those who were demon-possessed used *great* strength for evil purposes. In a good sense, Shamgar, the judge, slew 600 Philistines with an ox goad that he wielded as a club (Judg. 3:31).

Comment: Samson pictures professed Christians who have given their trust over to Papacy at various times in history. And even though people could be informed by knowing history, the delusion will occur again at the end of the age in a supposed period of enlightenment.

Judges 16:10 And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.

Judges 16:11 And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

Judges 16:12 Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liers in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.

Judges 16:13 And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

Judges 16:14 And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

When Delilah persisted in wanting to know the secret of Samson’s strength, he said that binding him with new ropes which had never been used would make him weak like any other man. When she did so bind him, “he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread” (RSV). The third time Samson said that his strength could be contained if she were to weave the seven locks of his hair into the web, but when Delilah followed this suggestion, not only was he able to keep his strength, but also he walked away with the entire heavy loom.

As mentioned earlier, the number seven was common to three of the tests. Indeed “seven” was part of the secret of Samson’s strength, and in verse 13, “seven” was even associated with his hair.

Comment: Samson still had not seen the Philistines lying in wait, so he thought Delilah was

playing little games with him.

Reply: Yes, he might have thought she was teasing him.

Judges 16:15 And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth.

Judges 16:16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;

Judges 16:17 That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.

Judges 16:18 And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shown me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

Judges 16:19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

Judges 16:20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

This time Delilah's persistence resulted in Samson's telling her the truth: "There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." Delilah again called the Philistines, saying that Samson had shown her "all his heart." Accordingly, the seven locks of Samson's head were shorn while he slept on her knees. When he awoke, his strength was gone, for "the LORD was departed from him."

Comment: Delilah really wanted the money. She pressed and urged Samson *daily* for the secret of his strength "so that his soul was vexed unto death."

Reply: Each of the Philistines had promised 1,100 pieces of silver—a large amount—which would insure her income for a considerable length of time.

Judges 16:21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

Judges 16:22 Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

Judges 16:23 Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.

Judges 16:24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

Judges 16:25 And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

Judges 16:26 And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

Judges 16:27 Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

Judges 16:28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

Judges 16:29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

Judges 16:30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

Judges 16:31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

Natural Picture

First, we will discuss the natural aspect in order to understand the incident better. The principals in the vision were Samson, Delilah, the young lad, the Philistine lords, and Dagon. Samson was beguiled and lulled to sleep in Delilah's lap. The seven locks of his head were shaved off, causing the loss of his strength. Then the Philistine lords who desired to apprehend Samson took him, gouged out his eyes, brought him to Gaza, bound him, and made him grind grain in the prison house like a brute beast.

The occasion that occurred was a great sacrifice to Dagon, the Philistine god in the temple bearing that name. At this national festival, Samson was called out of the prison to entertain the Philistine lords and others in attendance. He was made to do a little dance, etc., so that they could mock him. From their viewpoint, Samson was the only Israelite who had harassed them multiple times, the only one who had really opposed them.

What was the condition of the other Israelites at this time? For one thing, they had no weapons because the Philistines had forbidden them to use iron, which was needed to make weapons. Consequently, the Israelites were incapable of causing any large insurrection. Also, the Philistines plundered the Israelites' food supplies, making incursions into their property almost at will. As a result, the Israelites' willpower was at a low ebb, as shown when 3,000 men of Judah delivered Samson, bound, to the Philistines (Judg. 15:9-13). Of course he had permitted the binding, but nevertheless, how *weakened* the Israelites were, for although they had witnessed Samson's exploits for several years, they did not have the courage to support him! (Incidentally, not all of his exploits are recorded in Scripture—just certain highlights to give us a background of what he had been doing.) The Israelites should have viewed him as a potential leader who merited their support. If they had rallied behind Samson, they could have overthrown the Philistines, especially because when he did these exploits, the Spirit of the Lord

came upon him mightily. He had superhuman strength at such times. In addition, Samson had the ingenuity of leadership. In summary, the Israelites were more or less supine in regard to having the willpower to resist the Philistine servitude. Meanwhile, the Philistines observed that Samson had a weakness for women to a certain extent, particularly Philistine women.

Comment: Earlier we wondered why the incident with Samson and the harlot in Gaza was recorded in Scripture, but that incident gave him an opportunity to see the Temple of Dagon and to know that it was supported by two main pillars. At the time, his eyesight was intact to observe the construction of the temple.

Reply: Yes. God may have allowed him to go to Gaza to familiarize himself with the city.

The formerly strong Samson now looked like a weak dumbbell, especially in his blindness. Some people misjudge a person because of disease or deformity. The real character, intelligence, and strength of an individual can be misread because of outward appearance. However, while Samson was in prison, his hair had begun to grow again, and evidently, he now had the destruction of the temple in mind as he complied with the call to make sport and dance. Not only did he know that the temple was supported by two pillars, but also he knew that if he could position himself between those two pillars, he could put his arms around a sufficient portion to pull them down. Being blind, he could not find the pillars on his own, so he asked a young lad to guide him there.

Comment: The two pillars, the main support of the structure, had to be close together for Samson to get his two arms around them.

Reply: His arms probably went around only about one quarter of each pillar, but that was sufficient, as long as he got just enough of a grip with his fingertips.

In a *Reprint* article, the Pastor mentioned a historian named Pliny, who built a wooden amphitheater and boasted that all the people of Rome could fit on that structure, which was supported by only one large hinge. Therefore, a much greater congregation could have fit on that structure than on the Temple of Dagon.

The 20 years that Samson judged Israel were the last 20 years of his life, which ended with the destruction of the temple. Samson's judgeship of Israel was much different than that of Jephthah and Gideon, for they had the support of the Israelites. To the contrary, Samson was a one-man army. His exploits were done not to show off his strength but to inflict injury on the Philistines, who had Israel under an oppressive servitude. This motivation may have been a factor in his going to Gaza in the first place; that is, his motive may have been to familiarize himself with the center of the enemy stronghold. And that could have been the underlying reason for his trying to take a Philistine wife and his interest in Delilah of the valley of Sorek in Philistine territory. The Bible states the bare facts and is not interested in presenting a romantic story or in amusing us. It just tells the circumstances, showing that Samson knew about the pillars because he had been there and was acquainted with this territory.

Comment: Judges 14:4 supports that thought, for it says Samson wanted a Philistine wife because God "sought an occasion against the Philistines."

Reply: Samson may have had a strategy all along. He was a loner because the people did not support him, but the Philistines probably lessened the harshness of the servitude in the Gaza area because he struck fear in them. Because Samson realized he did not have the cooperation of the Israelites, he was not very communicative about his motives, even with his parents.

Comment: It is interesting that Samson said he wanted to be avenged for his *two* eyes, and there were *two* pillars in the Temple of Dagon (verse 28).

Q: After the seven locks of Samson's hair were cut off, he seemed surprised that his strength had departed. Why would he have felt this way?

A: The seven locks were cut off when he was asleep. Therefore, when he awoke, he might not have realized at first what had happened, for he definitely knew his strength was related to his hair. Samson is usually just thought of as having brute strength, but he was very shrewd.

Spiritual Representation

In the *Reprints*, the Pastor likened Samson to the true Church. We will first consider this reasoning, and then we will go into a completely different perspective, which we observed in just a couple of sentences under a picture of Samson in the old *Photodrama of Creation*. We believe the latter reasoning is correct.

The interpretation that Samson represents the true Church seems very plausible at first. The early Church started out with strength, purity, consecration, etc., but during the Middle Ages, it was lulled to sleep by Delilah, who pictures the nominal Church. The nominal Church had the hair of the true Church shorn so that, being outnumbered by the false Church, it had no say in the government. Hence the true Church lost its power as a force. Many historians use the term "primitive church," meaning that in the first three or four centuries, the true Church was strong and influential because of morality, purity, and faith. Even a worldly government had to recognize that these Christians were a power, but later they were lulled to sleep by Jezebel (Rev. 2:20).

The Pastor then said that the hair, the strength, would come back on the true Church in the Harvest period and that the true Church will be responsible for the destruction of the nominal Church. Pictures like Gideon and the 300 show that this is true to a certain extent, but this interpretation of Samson has two serious flaws. (1) Samson was *still blind* when he pulled down the two pillars of the Temple of Dagon, whereas the true Church will not be spiritually blind at that time. The Harvest message *removes* blindness; the feet members will *see clearly*. (2) Samson died *in the fall* of the two pillars (Catholicism and Protestantism) of the temple (mystic Babylon), whereas the feet members will die earlier, that is, *before* the fall of Babylon.

Therefore, we believe that Samson pictures the blind masses, the communicants, who support the church systems. The Catholic Church is made up of popes, bishops, cardinals, and priests, as opposed to the people, who are called "children" of the church. The communicants were deluded in the Dark and Middle Ages, but ever since the French Revolution and the increase of knowledge, the people have been getting more informed along general lines. They are still blind spiritually—that is, to the truth—but they are flexing their muscles and opposing the Catholic Church more and more. Factions within the church do not want to go along with papal infallibility to the extreme, so they are beginning to take exceptions and to debate abortion, contraception, etc. People in the Catholic Church want to remain loyal, but they will not swallow official church thinking on certain issues. As this discontented class start to grow in numbers, they feel their strength coming back. However, although their strength is increasing, their eyes are not opening to the truth. Therefore, the antitypical Samson has to be an element that is not in the hierarchy of church leadership but, rather, is in the supporting base of the church. In other words, the antitypical Samson element in Christendom are previously under the influence of the Catholic Church, but they will rebel and become involved in its overthrow.

With the interpretation of Samson as the blind masses, other details harmonize beautifully. For

example, the young lad pictures the true Church beyond the veil, who will guide the destruction—just as Jehu was anointed by Elijah through Elisha and a representative. Even when Jehu was destroying Jezebel and the kings, he said, “Did not *Elijah* say that dogs would eat the flesh of Jezebel?” He recognized that the prophecy he was involved in went back to Elijah. It is true that at the behest of Elisha, a man came to Jehu when he was sitting with his soldiers in Ramoth-gilead, but originally, the Lord had commissioned Elijah to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha (1 Kings 19:15,16).

In another picture, Samson slew 1,000 men with the jawbone of an ass (Judg. 15:15-19). Both the young lad and the jawbone of the ass represent the true Church, who are as *nothing* in the eyes of the world. They are indeed a *little* flock (Luke 12:32). Considered bibliolaters, they are accused by the world of making an idol out of God’s Word. So few in number, these zealous Christians are considered no threat at present. However, later, when conditions are ripe, the feet members will be like a match that sets a forest on fire, as illustrated by Samson when he used 300 foxes to burn the grain fields of the Philistines.

The point is that Samson represents different things in different pictures—as do Elisha, Moses, Abraham, David, etc. When Elisha crossed the Jordan River the first time, he represented the Great Company, but after he crossed back over Jordan and did certain works, he pictured the Ancient Worthies. Moses represents God, Jesus, the Law, and Second Death.

Comment: In a Future Events Conference, the word “enlightened” was used for Samson in this type with Delilah. He was described as “an unconsecrated, non-Spirit-begotten element in the church systems who are *somewhat* enlightened in that they will realize they have been deceived into supporting Papacy.”

Reply: Just as Samson realized he had been deceived, so the masses who support Papacy will realize they have been lulled to sleep. In the Russian Revolution, Lenin and Marx used the slogan “Religion is the opiate of the people.” They felt that the teachers of religion have used doctrine to stupefy and dupe those in the church systems. Consequently, they likened religion to an opiate, a drug.

Several factions will be involved in the overthrow of mystic Babylon (Christendom): eunuchs, dogs that lick the blood, the Lord’s Great Army, and Jehu. The pictures all harmonize but from different perspectives. Some are more comprehensive and some are less so, but they confirm one another, the principle being line upon line, here a little and there a little. Bringing the pictures together results in relative understanding of the subject based on cumulative evidence.

Q: Are the eunuchs part of the antitypical Samson element?

A: Samson represents those in the nominal Church system who are not considered part of the church hierarchy proper. These would include the people, monks, some priests, and nuns—all “children of the church.” Parish priests have been called “secular clergy” in contradistinction to city priests. Thus country parish priests are considered secondary. In the hierarchy of pope, cardinal, archbishop, etc., the dividing line between clergy and laity is the parish priests (secular clergy). From there on down, individuals are not part of church leadership. Those individuals include monks and orders such as hospices (but not Jesuits) that do good works but are not in the mainstream of church leadership. Therefore, the eunuchs can be included under “Samson.”

On the roof of the Dagon Temple were 3,000 people, and more were underneath. When the roof collapsed, all died. The suggestion is that those on the roof, plus those on the ground floor, were all looking at the two pillars where Samson was center stage. He was visible from both the top, which was like a horseshoe, and the bottom. We believe the spectacle of his pulling

down the pillars is meant for posterity. What a wonderful picture to see as it actually happened!

Delilah pictures the Roman Catholic Church, the church ecclesiastical, whereas Dagon represents Papacy, the man of sin, the office of the pope, the rulership at the Vatican, Rome. Revelation 17 distinguishes between the beast and the harlot, which are two different aspects of Catholicism. From this standpoint, the rulership in Rome is one thing, and the church itself—cardinals, archbishops, etc., who teach the doctrine of the church—is another. However, the church is under the headship of Rome.

Thus we feel the details fit the type with Delilah better when Samson is interpreted as the blind masses whose strength comes back. The blind Samson knew he had been deluded. Hence he had an inner enlightenment. However, while realizing he had been foolish to allow his hair to be shorn, he did not know Biblical truth. The lad who directed Samson's hands gave him the opportunity to pull down the very basic structure, the pillars upon which the whole system was supported. The two pillars represent Catholicism and Protestantism.

Q: Did the young lad die when the temple collapsed?

A: The account is silent on that point.

Comment: At a Future Events Conference, the young lad was said to picture the Church beyond the veil using an instrumentality down here. He represents a convenient circumstance where an individual is used for a momentous occurrence.

Reply: Elijah was off the scene in the Jehu picture, having been translated, but the authority was passed on from Elijah to Elisha and then to the servant (son of a prophet) sent to inform Jehu. Elijah was accredited with the anointing.

Comment: This chapter is helpful, for it gives a reason for the incident with Samson and the harlot. The fact he went in unto her and then came out and took the doors of the city gate indicates he knew, from the moment he entered Gaza, that the Philistines would be lying in wait for him. The prank was already fixed in his mind. Thus he had a higher purpose in going to Gaza. Since he is an Ancient Worthy, we need to know about the extenuating circumstance.

Reply: When Samson first went to Gaza, we do not think he realized what would happen later on with the two pillars. However, the Lord made sure that he went by the temple and that the function of the two pillars was recorded on his brain. Samson did not want his hair shaved off. He knew that Delilah was teasing him, but he never dreamed what she would really do. After he was blinded and put in the prison house, he thought, "What will I do? I am blind and helpless. Even if I break out of this prison, where will I go?" Therefore, he plotted how to get revenge when the convenient time came.

The seven locks of shorn hair can represent the seven stages of the Church. Hence they indicate a time element.

Judges 17:1 And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

Chapter 17 is an abrupt change. Chapter 16, which concluded with the exploits of Samson, may in reality be the conclusion of the Book of Judges. Subsequent episodes—about Micah, the tribe of Benjamin, etc., as well as the Book of Ruth—are like appendices to the Book of Judges. We will try to make certain observations as we finish the Book of Judges, for the book is difficult to understand unless we have a certain perspective of its purpose. But first, we will read and discuss a few verses of this chapter.

The time setting of the incident starting in verse 1 is *way back* to near the beginning of the Period of the Judges. Chapters 17-21 are sort of a review of the Book of Judges but from a perspective that zeros in on three important symbolic lessons. The lessons will become apparent as we study this incident about Micah, who was from Mount Ephraim. Incidentally, the Book of Micah pertains to a different individual who lived during the Period of the Kings.

Judges 17:2 And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.

Judges 17:3 And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

Verse 2 begins the account of Micah. Initially, his mother had 1,100 shekels of silver, which she had dedicated to Jehovah. However, her son stole the money. Evidently, he later experienced contrition of heart and confessed to her that he had taken the money. Now he wanted to restore the entire sum.

Earlier, when his mother missed the money, she had cursed about it and spoken in Micah's hearing, saying in effect, "Cursed be the one who took the 1,100 shekels of silver that were dedicated to God." When Micah heard the curse and the motive for the money—its dedication—he was apparently panic-stricken and thus wanted to undo the harm he had caused. His mother readily forgave him.

The number of silver shekels is unusual, but why was 1,100 mentioned with such specificity? It calls to mind the 1,100 pieces of silver that were offered to Delilah by each of the Philistine lords who wanted the secret of Samson's strength. Because 1,100 pieces of silver are mentioned three times in Judges (16:5 and 17:2,3), there is probably a symbolic significance of which we are unaware.

Why did Micah's mother say, "Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son," when he restored the money? Although his confession is noteworthy, she may have suspected he was the thief, for she uttered the curse in his presence, perhaps to stir him up. Also, by replying so quickly and positively, she may have been trying to rescind the curse. Of course from an emotional standpoint, she appreciated his confession and the return of the money.

Judges 17:4 Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

Judges 17:5 And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

Of the 1,100 shekels of silver that Micah restored to his mother, she took 200 shekels to a craftsman to make a graven image and a molten image. The "images" are not described, but an image was used as a crutch in pleading to God in prayer and worship.

We believe the two images were related in that one was used to cast the other, so both were of the same likeness. In other words, a mold was made so that molten metal could be poured into it. An artisan shaped the mold, which was made of either wood or preferably metal. (In addition, an artisan sometimes carved a mold from soft stone.) At any rate, molten metal was

poured into the mold to make the image. When the metal cooled, the person had a durable image with a polished finish.

The graven and molten images were in the house of Micah. He also had a “house of gods,” that is, likenesses of other deities. The painstaking details suggest a spiritual lesson. Micah also made an ephod and teraphim “and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.” He probably chose his oldest son to be the family priest. Evidently, Micah himself did not feel worthy of being a priest. At any rate, the account of Micah is derogatory, for an Ephraimite, not a Levite, consecrated, or dedicated, one of his sons, who was also an Ephraimite.

Judges 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

The expression of verse 6, which is a summary statement, is repeated in whole or in part in Judges 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25, the last verse of the book. “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” This condition existed during the Period of the Judges, and it continued through Samuel, the last judge.

We find out later that every man’s doing what was right in his own sight started near the beginning of the Period of the Judges. The fact this type of problem did not occur during the days of Joshua suggests that, like Moses, he was a mighty force and a strong leader in helping Israel keep close to the Lord. After Joshua’s demise, it did not take long for a degenerating experience to come into the land. Why and how did this change occur?

Just before his death, as recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses gave a synopsis of the moral code of the Law and enjoined the Israelites to obey God. Before he went up into the mountain to die, he repeated much of this instruction to Joshua, thus transferring the responsibility for leading the Israelites in obedience. After Joshua’s death six years later, many problems set in, but why?

1. By not conquering and driving out all the Canaanites in the land, Israel lived in the midst of heathen worship and practices and tended to copy them. Joshua had warned the Israelites to put away the strange gods that were among them and to incline their hearts unto the Lord God, but the people forgot his admonitions (Josh. 24:23). We are reminded of the principle “evil communications corrupt good manners [conduct]” (1 Cor. 15:33). The customs and practices of the Canaanites were eventually incorporated into the worship of Jehovah.
2. Since the land was divided, the 12 tribes lived separately and away from the *central* influence around the Tabernacle. For centuries, the Tabernacle was at Shiloh, so contact with the structure and the Lord’s Word and instruction depended on individual zeal.
3. Although God raised up judges, there were periods in between when Israel lacked leadership. One judge would come on the scene and be very forceful and helpful, but when he died, the people again began to wander. Captivity followed, and every 20 years or so, another judge was raised up by the Lord, etc. Without continual leadership, the tribes got away from the Word of God. For the account to state that “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” means the people could not have studied the Scriptures closely, or else they would not have committed such obvious sins. All of the Israelites should have been able to see the contrast from what Moses stated in the Law and their actual practices.

Spiritual Antitype

In studying this portion of the Book of Judges, we see an analogy between the experiences of

the Israelites and what happened in the Christian Church. After the apostles fell asleep, the Nicolaitan element started to gain sway as the various patriarchs began to do what was right in their own eyes. For a while, there was more or less equality in the sense that many bishops—of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Carthage, etc.—did what was right in their own eyes, leading their flocks away from the Bible and establishing institutions. In time, the bishop of Rome emerged as the strongest and thus became the central authority. But in these various groups, there was wheat. The wheat was in a tare field as a godly element, as true Christians, but the ones who predominated in both numbers and influence were the tare class, who professed to be wheat. Some of them had good motives, but they did not adhere to the Lord's Word.

Thus we see the danger. Yes, some of the Israelites meant well and were more dedicated than others, but their ways were displeasing to the Lord. This same deterioration occurred in the spiritual house, starting not long after the Ephesus period of the Church (Rev. 2:1-7).

Judges 17:7 And there was a young man out of Bethlehem-judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.

Judges 17:8 And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

Judges 17:9 And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place.

Judges 17:10 And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

Judges 17:11 And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons.

Judges 17:12 And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

Judges 17:13 Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

Earlier Micah had anointed a son to be his priest, but it bothered him that the son was not a Levite. Now it seemed like Divine Providence for the Levite to come to his house. Accordingly, Micah persuaded the Levite to be his priest. Thus Micah meant well, but he was wrong.

In judging His people down through the Gospel Age, God did not require all of them to know the full truth of the Scriptures, for many, especially in the Dark Ages, had little of the Scriptures in their possession. Faithful Christians did their best under the circumstances. To know the Lord's Word, some went to the cathedral, which was open at all times, and read the big Bible that was chained to the rostrum. To do this, the individual first had to learn to read Latin, for the Scriptures were in that language. But even so, how much could one read under that circumstance? Therefore, God made considerable allowance in the Dark Ages for the lack of knowledge and understanding in His people. The same condition occurred during the Period of the Judges. Since the Law was not readily available, the Israelites had to be very zealous in order to get instruction.

Q: Wasn't it wrong for this Levite to be wandering around looking for a place to live when the

Levites had been assigned special cities as their residence?

A: Joshua 20 and 21 enumerate the cities that were given to the Levites. The first choice for the location of these cities was in Judah, where Aaron's sons were allowed shelter. The Levite was in that area, but evidently, the Levites had become so numerous that he was dissatisfied and in his wanderings ended up at Mount Ephraim in the house of Micah.

Comment: In all, the Levites had 48 cities, so they had a choice of residence and six cities of refuge.

When Micah became aware that the Levite was there, he thought, "The Lord will really bless me if the Levite stays in my house." Wanting to worship the Lord, Micah, an *Ephraimite*, consecrated the *Levite* just as he had consecrated his son earlier.

Comment: Judges 2:8-10 reads, "And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him ... in the mount of Ephraim.... And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel."

Reply: Men's teachings and traditions began to supplement and make void the word of God.

Further Antitypical Significance

Micah had a "house of gods [lesser deities]." And so the nominal Church was ostensibly a Christian Church, but the Virgin Mary, Joseph, and various saints were worshipped and statues were made. Hence lesser gods were mingled with the true God. This mixture, or confusion, which is exactly what is recorded here in the type, happened shortly after the death of the apostles. When they fell asleep, the Adversary came in and sowed tares, which grew up and choked and outnumbered the wheat. In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, the servants asked, "What shall we do?" The Master, who predicted this would happen, replied, "Let them both grow together until the harvest, when the separation will take place. If you gather out the tares now, the wheat will also be uprooted" (Matt. 13:29,30 paraphrase). The little knowledge of truth that the wheat class had was needed for their life and spiritual sustenance.

Comment: Micah gave the Levite an annual salary and provided food, clothing, and lodging, whereas the Levites were supposed to be recipients of *freewill* offerings. The antitype would be the *paid* ministries of the leadership of the nominal system.

Reply: Yes, the Catholic Church supplies garments, food, and shelter for the priests and calls them "Father." Although the Levite was young, Micah enjoined him, "Dwell with me [in my house], and be unto me a *father* and a *priest*" (verses 7 and 10). Thus the condition that developed back there in Jewry also happened with the Christian Church.

Judges 18:1 In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

Judges 18:2 And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there.

Judges 18:3 When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here?

Judges 18:4 And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest.

Judges 18:5 And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.

Judges 18:6 And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go.

The tribe of Dan had been given certain cities in Judah for an inheritance, but now the people of Dan were constricted and needed more land for their increase in population. If they had been familiar with the Scriptures, they would have known the deathbed prophecies of Jacob and Moses, which predicted their ultimate occupation of land to the far north.

Five men of Dan were sent “to spy out the land” for additional territory. This account parallels Moses’ sending out 12 spies to view the Promised Land. They were to come back and describe the land so that Moses and the others would have a measure of familiarity and know how to proceed. The 12 spies went way north and searched out the land for 40 days. Upon their return, they reported that the Hebron area was especially fruitful, and they even brought back grapes.

In going north, the five Danites came to the midpoint of Mount Ephraim, where Micah and the Levite were. Upon hearing the Levite’s voice, they recognized him and asked how he had gotten there. He explained that Micah had hired him as his priest. Then the five men said, “We are looking for our inheritance, and we need to know where to settle. Would you pray to God and ask His blessing.” The Levite responded, “Yes, the Lord will prosper your efforts so that you find what you are looking for.” The five Danites liked the Levite’s favorable reply, and when they left, other thoughts started to percolate, as we will see.

Q: Since the prophecy told that Dan would get territory in the north, was this favorable message actually from the Lord?

A: Yes, under the circumstances, the Levite’s message was from God. It was a true message because the five Danites recognized that there was more spirituality in the tribe of Levi. The Levite was of Aaron’s seed, of Kohath, even if he was not perfectly “ordained” from the Lord’s standpoint. The lineage was Levi, Kohath, and then Amram. Amram married Jochebed and had three children: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Judges 18:7 Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man.

Judges 18:8 And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye?

Judges 18:9 And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.

Judges 18:10 When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.

From Mount Ephraim and the house of Micah, the five spies went far north to Laish, which was between the central and eastern branch of the headwaters of the Jordan River. The land was large and fruitful; that is, it was lush and fertile with plenty of room for the constricted Danites.

Therefore, the five men returned to their brethren of Zorah and Eshtaol, who had sent them, and gave an enthusiastic report. They said in effect, "The land is good, and the inhabitants are indolent and disorganized. They have no fear and are not prepared militarily. Moreover, they are cut off from Zidon, their headquarters." The people of Laish had originally come from Zidon, which is on the coast of Lebanon today, but they were now separated from whatever military force the Zidonians had. Thus the five men were saying, "The land is a plum ready to pick. Why are you so still? Arise and take the land!" Evidently, the listeners had a little doubt at first, but the spies counteracted that doubt with a very encouraging report.

Judges 18:11 And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war.

Judges 18:12 And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-jearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjath-jearim.

Judges 18:13 And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

Judges 18:14 Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do.

Judges 18:15 And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him.

Judges 18:16 And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate.

Judges 18:17 And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war.

Judges 18:18 And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

Judges 18:19 And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

Judges 18:20 And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people.

Judges 18:21 So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them.

Not all of the armed men of the Danites in Judah went to subdue Laish, just 600 chosen men of war. Taking the same route that the five had previously followed, the 600 stopped at Mount Ephraim. The five spies told the others about the Levite in Micah's house and the ephod, the teraphim, and the lesser deities. Then the five spies said, "Consider what you have to do." In their mission to take over a new territory, the Danites felt they needed a priest to accompany them, so they proffered an opportunity for the Levite to go with them. They reasoned, "Would you rather be a priest to *one man* or to a *whole tribe*?" The Levite liked the suggestion and agreed to go with the Danites. In addition to his ephod and teraphim, the priest took Micah's images. Micah, who was only a householder, had too few helpers to stop the robbery. The Danites continued on their way with the religious artifacts.

Judges 18:22 And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

Judges 18:23 And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company?

Judges 18:24 And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee?

Judges 18:25 And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household.

Judges 18:26 And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house.

Judges 18:27 And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

Judges 18:28 And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

Judges 18:29 And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first.

Judges 18:30 And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.

Judges 18:31 And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

How long was "all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh"? The Tabernacle, the "house of God," was in Shiloh for more than 500 years, that is, from the time the Israelites entered the Promised Land, through the entire Period of the Judges, and for both Saul's and David's reigns of 40 years each. In David's lifetime, the Ark was taken down to Jerusalem and put in temporary housing.

Such was the condition that existed in Israel when the Danites went north to occupy Laish. Hence there was an estrangement from the Tabernacle, for if the Danites had their own little religion up in the lush land of Laish, they were not interested in journeying south to Shiloh for

annual worship. Still later, after Solomon's death and in the fourth year of Rehoboam, when the nation was divided into a northern and a southern kingdom, Jeroboam instituted false temple worship with two golden calves, and one of the calves was in the city of Dan. Because of the laxity in religious worship according to the Law for more than five centuries, the Israelites in northern Israel were ripe for further deflection. Jeroboam set up rival places of worship in Dan and Bethel to deliberately keep the people from going to Jerusalem.

In the antitype, the golden calves of Dan and Bethel correspond to the Eastern and the Western Church. First, the division in nominal Christianity was just among the patriarchs, but later it solidified and coalesced down to the Eastern Church and the Western (Latin) Church.

The historical account in chapters 17 and 18 gives us the background of the tribe of Dan. It started in Judges 17:7 with a particular Levite. Now verse 30 tells us that the Levite was Jonathan, and his lineage is very interesting. Jonathan was the son of Gershom, who was the son of Moses. Although verse 30 states that Gershom was the son Manasseh, that is incorrect, for all of the old Hebrew manuscripts have "Moses" but use a lowercase "n" so as not to sully Moses' name. Thus Jonathan was the grandson of Moses and Zipporah (Exod. 2:21,22). The three consonants for Moses are Mss, but because an "n" was inserted at the top, the translators rendered the name Manasseh. Similarly, the Jews did not want the name Jehovah to be pronounced, for they felt that speaking the name would be sacrilegious. Therefore, they substituted "Adonai" (Lord) whenever the Scriptures had Jehovah. In other words, they read the name differently from the way it was spelled. The Jews regarded Moses so highly that instead of seeing him as a figure of the real Messiah, they revered him almost as if he were their Messiah. Moses had said, "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deut. 18:15).

Comment: Thus the grandson of Moses, only the *third* generation, went astray.

Jonathan and his sons were priests to the Danites until the captivity of the ten tribes by the Assyrians about 150 years before 606 BC. Therefore, from the beginning of the Period of the Judges until about 750 BC, the Danites were served by an unauthorized arrangement. The pure Christian religion was sullied the same way, for in time, Antichrist arose instead of Christ. The word "Christ" is there, with the addition of the prefix "anti," which indicates the *false* Christ.

Comment: At first, it might seem that there would be more than three generations from Moses to Jonathan. However, as pointed out previously, chapters 17 and 18 are the *beginning* of the Period of the Judges, so the Levite Jonathan could have been the third generation from Moses.

Reply: The Period of the Judges began after Joshua's death, which was early in Israel's history. The account of the house of Micah and his idols, the Levite, and the Danites is significant, for there is a counterpart in the Christian religion.

Comment: The account of the Levite shows the danger and temptation of the Nicolaitan spirit, the prideful desire for more and more control. The desire of the Nicolaitan element is pictured well by the choice that faced Jonathan: to rule over one man or to rule over a whole tribe. The Book of Revelation traces the development of the Nicolaitan element from a few individuals, to ecclesias, to doctrines, and finally to a predominating, all-controlling influence under Papacy.

Q: Who does Micah represent in the antitype?

A: We have not thoroughly analyzed the type. However, the general lesson, as expressed, seems very apparent. Micah first encouraged the Levite's residence. Subsequently, the Levite chose to go up north with the tribe of Dan.

It is interesting, too, that the Christian religion started in Judah. The account of the Levite typically shows the progression of movement from that center of authority and worship to Rome. The council in the early Church, which was convened by revered holy men who met in Jerusalem, is the only recognized conclave, but it did not supersede the advice of the apostles (Acts 15:5-21). Because of the problem with the thinking of Jewish Christians that the Christian had to be under the Law and its works, as well as to accept the gospel of grace and faith, advice was needed.

Comment: The Israelites had no qualms about setting up images.

Reply: In making unauthorized graven images, they did not see that they were taking into their *own* hands what the Lord was doing. With regard to the Gospel Age, the Lord anointed the 12 apostles, but then along came *man's* idea of apostolic succession, which is not taught in the Scriptures. In the Ephesus period of the Church, the message was that others were calling themselves apostles, but they were liars (Rev. 2:2). The Holy City has only the 12 foundations, yet cardinals appoint the pope, who is considered an apostle or even higher. Because they do not see the sanctity of God's Word, innovations are added. And that is what happened in Jesus' day, for he said that the scribes and Pharisees made void the Word of God through the traditions of men (Mark 7:13). The principle is the same today. People go to religious colleges to get a degree to be a minister or a priest, but are they taught the Bible? No. Instead they are taught the rules and regulations of the church and its creeds, how to administer the church from a financial and business standpoint, etc. The traditions and teachings of men crowd out the knowledge of God and His Word.

In conclusion, without a background of Old Testament history, it would be very difficult to understand the Book of Judges. Chapter 16 is really the natural ending of the book. Then chapters 17 and 18 go back and focus on the early part of the Period of the Judges. Of course Samuel was considered the last judge before the era of the kings, and he anointed Saul as the first king. But as far as the Book of Judges is concerned, Samson more or less concluded the main part, and the subsequent appendices relate to the house of Micah and the tribe of Dan, and then later on to another Levite and the tribe of Benjamin. The Book of Ruth, which is sandwiched in between Judges and 1 and 2 Samuel, is pure and good history, whereas the appendices are an unfortunate history of practices that defiled Jewish worship in the type and the Christian Church in the antitype.

Judges 19:1 And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehem-judah.

Chapters 1-16 dealt with the judges up through Samson. Of course the Book of 1 Samuel ends the judgeship era. In between are chapters 17-21 of the Book of Judges. Chapters 17 and 18, which are one appendix, tell of Micah and a Levite. Chapters 19-21, another appendix, relate an incident with a different Levite. Both appendices occurred early in the Period of the Judges, which began after Joshua's decease. Again we are reminded that there was no king in Israel in those days.

A Levite who was sojourning on the side of Mount Ephraim took a concubine out of Bethlehem in Judah. Evidently, several Levites had left the crowded living conditions in the Hebron area and wandered north, feeling that their service would be better in one of the other Levitical cities. Since the concubine was taken out of Bethlehem-Judah, we can assume that she came from there and that the Levite had been down in that area.

Mount Ephraim, which is mentioned in both appendices, was not far from Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was set up. Being in the northern kingdom, Ephraim represents Papacy, so if there is an antitype, it would be along this line. By the Levite's going to Mount Ephraim at this early period of the judgeship era, he was nearer home base, as it were.

Judges 19:2 And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Bethlehem-judah, and was there four whole months.

The Levite's concubine was unfaithful to him and went back to her father's house in Bethlehem for four whole months.

Judges 19:3 And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.

The Levite went to Bethlehem to "speak friendly" to the concubine and retrieve her. The statement "she brought him into her father's house" suggests that she was in the mood for reconciliation. The concubine's father rejoiced to see that the Levite had come to reclaim her.

Judges 19:4 And his father-in-law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there.

The Levite's father-in-law extended food and lodging to him for three days. Subsequently he urged the Levite to stay on and on (verses 5-9). What was the purpose of the concubine's father in retaining the Levite? A Levite was considered a little above the ordinary Israelite, so he was using hospitality to try to restore the Levite's relationship with his daughter. Apparently, he wanted the relationship to be more lasting this time.

Q: Was the Levite remiss in accepting so much food and hospitality and not sticking to what his duties should have been?

A: That would depend on the number of Levites and where they were. Some of the Levites were with the Tabernacle, but others dwelled in special Levitical cities throughout the nation, some of which were quite far removed from Shiloh and the Tabernacle. Meanwhile, the Levites kept multiplying and becoming more and more numerous, so many were not active around the Tabernacle. Instead they lived either in the Levitical cities or in the territories, or parishes, surrounding them. Of course Shiloh (and later Jerusalem) was the center of religious worship for the annual feasts. But in addition, the Levitical city arrangement led to the idea of separated Jews going to their own synagogue for instruction during the week, and Levites and a "parish" priest had assigned duties in each synagogue. Their duties were more along the lines of visiting the sick, providing schooling in the Law, and giving sermons. Therefore, unlike the 40 years in the wilderness, the Levites did not have a tight regimen in this period of Israel's history. In the beginning, there were only four priests, and two of them died. Also, the Levites were more limited in number, and they were all together in the one place. Consequently, their services were restricted and regimented. That is why later on, when the Levites multiplied greatly, David assigned tasks and had singers and other functions to keep them active in anticipation of the Temple that would be built. Moreover, he divided the priesthood into 24 courses so that all would have opportunity for service.

The account here in Judges is straight narration. It does not go into much about the character of the Levite or the concubine but simply tells of the conditions that existed during the Period of the Judges. We know this incident with the Levite and his concubine took place very early in the judgeship era—shortly after Joshua's death—because Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron,

was alive (Judg. 20:28; Exod. 6:25).

Judges 19:5 And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son-in-law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.

Judges 19:6 And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry.

Judges 19:7 And when the man rose up to depart, his father-in-law urged him: therefore he lodged there again.

Judges 19:8 And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them.

Judges 19:9 And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father-in-law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end, lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and tomorrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home.

Judges 19:10 But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem; and there were with him two asses saddled, his concubine also was with him.

Comment: The concubine's father might have been lonely and thus wanted company.

Reply: Also, it was an honor to entertain a Levite in his home. In any event, there was certainly a delaying action on the part of the father-in-law. On the afternoon of the fifth day, the Levite finally insisted on leaving with his concubine.

Comment: Since the concubine had been unfaithful, she deserved to know there was disapproval, whereas the Levite and her father engaged in merriment day after day. To play the whore was a serious offense.

Reply: Not only should the concubine have been put to death under the Law, but by accepting his father-in-law's hospitality, the Levite was covering up the sin of adultery to a certain extent.

Comment: The Levite took the initial step by going to find the concubine and wanting her back.

Reply: Yes, he hoped for reconciliation.

When the Levite left on his journey, he arrived at Jebus (Jerusalem) late in the afternoon. Since the Israelites did not conquer Jebus until David's day, the explanatory note "which is Jerusalem" would have been added hundreds of years later when Ezra edited the Hebrew writings and collated and codified them into one cohesive whole. The Scriptures were lost until Ezra searched them out in the captive storehouses in Babylon. After reading the Scriptures, he reenergized Israel to go back to the Law, for they then realized how far they had departed from the precepts of Moses.

If we give the laxity that existed a spiritual application, it pictures the condition of the nominal Church during the Gospel Age. Men did what seemed right in their own eyes. Papacy

developed because of the people's lack of familiarity with the Scriptures themselves. To a smattering of Scripture were added *man's* teachings. The same thing happened in Israel.

Judges 19:11 And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it.

Judges 19:12 And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah.

Judges 19:13 And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah.

Judges 19:14 And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin.

Judges 19:15 And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging.

The Levite mentioned Gibeah and Ramah as two alternative places to spend the night, for he intended to press on. Both of these cities were about equidistant, being five miles north of Jerusalem but in different directions. Moreover, both cities belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, the northern boundary of which was relatively close to Jerusalem. The Levite ended up in Gibeah at nightfall, and no man offered them lodging. In the Genesis account, Abraham was just the opposite, for he was given to hospitality. The principle of hospitality was considered so important among the Arabs that a stranger's safest bet was to run to a home, for then the individuals of that household could not violate him, even if he was from the enemy camp. At any rate, the Levite sat down in the street of Gibeah, prepared to lodge there for the night.

Comment: The Levite might have fared better in Jebus than among his own brethren, the Israelites.

Reply: That is probably true.

Judges 19:16 And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place were Benjamites.

Judges 19:17 And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?

Judges 19:18 And he said unto him, We are passing from Bethlehem-judah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Bethlehem-judah, but I am now going to the house of the LORD; and there is no man that receiveth me to house.

Judges 19:19 Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man which is with thy servants: there is no want of any thing.

Judges 19:20 And the old man said, Peace be with thee; howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me; only lodge not in the street.

Judges 19:21 So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they

washed their feet, and did eat and drink.

It is touching that an *old* man who had worked in the field that day was given to hospitality, and he was probably not that well off temporally. The Levite said, “I have plenty here—food in store not just for myself but also for those with me and for the animals, so I can lodge in the street for the night.” But the old man urged the Levite not to lodge in the street. Thus the Levite was brought to the old man’s house and lodged there. The old man gave his own provender to the asses, and the Levite and his servant and concubine ate and drank.

Comment: The guests washed their feet, and they ate and drank, “making their hearts merry” (verse 22).

Reply: The relaxation removed the tension of the day and restored their strength.

Comment: Again the Levite was not strictly adhering to what he should have been doing according to the Law—either with himself or with his concubine, who had played the whore.

Reply: That is true. This appendix shows what was going on in the Levitical order at the beginning of the Period of the Judges. Not only were the people lax but also those in the religious realm, who should have been more alert and circumspect in their teaching and obedience to the Law.

Q: What specific violations was the Levite guilty of?

A: Because the concubine had been unfaithful, the Levite should have set her aside and not have renewed the relationship. Of course the Law taught that a Levite was to marry a virgin and gave certain limitations, but we do not know the background of the concubine except that she was from Bethlehem-judah. The point is that the Levite’s conduct shows the priesthood was careless and lax at that time.

Incidentally, there was nothing dishonorable about being a concubine, but that type of marriage was secondary. Perhaps this marriage was arranged for practical purposes instead of being a real love match. We are not told if this Levite had another wife, but the tenor of the story suggests that she was the only one. The account just gives a matter-of-fact statement of the conditions that existed and lets us draw our own conclusions as to what happened. Everyone was doing what *seemed* right in his *own* eyes—both the Levites and the people—and there was a leniency with regard to the Law. Moses had been so careful to tell Joshua, and Joshua had been so faithful to remind the Israelites not to forget the Law. It was to be read every seven years, its precepts were to be kept in their minds, Scriptures were to be put on the doorposts of their houses, etc., yet the laxity began right after Joshua’s death.

Judges 19:22 Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.

Judges 19:23 And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.

Judges 19:24 Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing.

Judges 19:25 But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go.

At this time in history, the woman was not considered on a par with the man except in rare cases such as Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel. One justification was probably that only males were in the priesthood and the services of the Tabernacle. In other words, the Israelites drew lessons from certain facts they improperly carried over into their personal lives.

Q: Is the sin of homosexuality so gross and abnormal that by comparison, the abuse of a woman was considered a lesser offense?

A: Yes.

Comment: At least the latter was a male-female relationship.

Reply: We are reminded of the similar incident with Lot and the two angels in Sodom and Gomorrah. When news spread that two strangers were in the city, the men of Sodom came to Lot's door and *demand*ed to "know" them.

Q: What does the term "sons of Belial" mean?

A: The implication is "sons of Satan." With Bel being a false god, it was like a cult relationship that has existed down through the ages.

The old man went out to the wicked men of the city and tried to reason with them just as Lot had tried to do with the men of Sodom. First, the old man proffered his own daughter and the Levite's concubine. (Apparently, he and the Levite had quickly discussed the matter, so the offer of the concubine was with the latter's consent.) Certainly the Levite was agreeable because he was the one who thrust out the concubine in the final analysis. The men of the city abused her "all the night," and "when the day began to spring, they let her go."

Judges 19:26 Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light.

Judges 19:27 And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way: and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold.

Judges 19:28 And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered. Then the man took her up upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place.

The concubine returned to the old man's house where the Levite was and fell down at the barred door with her hands on the threshold. There she died. When the Levite arose, opened the doors of the house, and saw her lying there, he crudely said, "Get up, and let us be going" (see RSV). After all, he knew she had been out all night and what was happening to her. In addition, she had probably protested and groaned repeatedly—and loud enough for the Levite to hear. When he realized she was dead, he put her on an ass and returned to his home.

The Levite's cold remark shows that he did not have love and compassion for his concubine. Hence there would have been other motivations for the marriage—perhaps it was a marriage

of convenience. Earlier, when he went to retrieve her following her unfaithfulness and wanted “to speak friendly unto her” (verse 3), he might have had ulterior motives, especially since he did not originally marry her in the full sense but had her only as a concubine.

The concubine’s hands upon the threshold showed *repentance*. How very sad! She may have sensed that her experience came upon her providentially as retribution for her sins of unfaithfulness. His being a Levite made them, in a sense, like sins against the priesthood. Even if he was relatively cool in his restored relationship with her, she was asking for forgiveness in spite of what she had gone through.

In our day, abusing women all night is commonly done in times of war and in countries that are not under proper control by the magistrates. And in this case, the abuse was probably of an “abnormal” nature, as indicated by her death.

Now the Levite was emotionally affected. Seeing her hands on the threshold alarmed him and struck him to the core of his being. As a result, he became very vengeful. If the concubine had not been there in the morning, presumably he would have gone on his journey without her, but now he was touched with a sense of guilt and felt that something had to be done about this terrible atrocity.

Judges 19:29 And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coasts of Israel.

Judges 19:30 And it was so, that all that saw it said, 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.

The Levite cut up the concubine into 12 pieces and sent a piece to each of the 12 tribes. Those who saw a piece of her said, “No such deed was done since the Israelites left Egypt. Consider the deed, and speak your minds.”

Comment: If the Levite had not seen the concubine afterwards, he would not have considered what a dreadful night she had. But now his conscience was awakened, and he knew he had a responsibility.

Reply: Yes, that is true. Had she not returned to him, he might have just gone on his journey, mollifying his conscience to a certain extent with the attitude “let bygones be bygones.”

This incident reminds us of two other incidents, as follows:

1. King Saul cut up a yoke of (two) oxen and sent the pieces to all the tribes of Israel to get them to come to war for an atrocity that had been committed. As a result, “the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent” (1 Sam. 11:7). The “atrocity” is stated in 1 Samuel 11:1,2. “Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, *that I may thrust out all your right eyes*, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel.” Then the men of Jabesh asked for a little time, saying in effect, “If our fellow Israelites do not enter into this dispute, we will have our eyes put out at your request.” Jabesh was more or less the capital of Gilead, which was a part of Israel at that time.
2. In ancient Egyptian history, Nimrod was cut into pieces and sent into all the coasts of Egypt.

Even though verse 30 says that “no such deed [was] done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day,” that statement does not apply to Nimrod, for he lived much earlier. The Levite may have been familiar with that early history, which had unified Egypt to rebel against the religion of Nimrod. Nimrod’s death did not solve the problem of false religion, but it did stir up righteous indignation for a while. Later on, Nimrod worship went underground and pervaded the whole nation.

Judges 20:1 Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh.

Judges 20:2 And the chief of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword.

Judges 20:3 (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness?

The tribes of Israel gathered together as one man from Dan to Beersheba, including those east of the Jordan River in Gilead. The sending of the concubine pieces unified the nation to come to this council to determine what to do. The meeting took place in Mizpeh.

The Levite had cut the concubine into 12 pieces. A piece was sent to each of the tribes *except* Benjamin. The twelfth piece was sent to the one-half tribe of Manasseh across the Jordan. Proof that the children of Benjamin did not receive a piece is the fact they “*heard*” the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpeh—that is, they were *not notified*—and they wanted to know the reason for the gathering, which consisted of 400,000 men of battle age, or men of war.

Q: How were the 12 pieces of the concubine delivered? The flesh would have been putrefying by this time.

A: The Levite would have sent servants (plural) to deliver a piece to the prince of each tribe. Numbers 7 gives the names of the princes of Israel, and that practice was continued. By now, however, many of the princes were so weak and ordinary that God raised up judges. Having stronger personalities, the judges unified the nation and brought them out of periods of oppression.

Judges 20:4 And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge.

Judges 20:5 And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead.

Judges 20:6 And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.

Judges 20:7 Behold, ye are all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel.

The Levite told how the men of Gibeah had threatened him and then abused his concubine unto death, committing “lewdness [abomination] and folly [wantonness] in Israel” (see RSV). Then he had cut the dead concubine in 12 pieces and sent them throughout the nation of Israel on both sides of the Jordan River. After this recounting, the Levite asked for the advice and

counsel of the 11 tribes.

As verses 8-10 show, the tribes were incensed. Their reaction shows what hospitality signified at that time. Guests were not to be violated in any way, even if they were enemies.

Comment: When the Levite repeated his story, he explained that the men of Gibeah would have killed him through abuse if he had not given them his concubine.

Reply: Yes. If he had not put out the concubine, he would have been killed.

Judges 20:8 And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house.

Judges 20:9 But now this shall be the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up by lot against it;

Judges 20:10 And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.

Judges 20:11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

The tribes responded by saying that 10 percent (a tithe) of all their men of war would unitedly go to Benjamin and execute judgment on Gibeah.

Judges 20:12 And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you?

Judges 20:13 Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel:

Judges 20:14 But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel.

Since the other Benjamites rallied to support Gibeah, the *entire* tribe shared in the guilt. Instead they should have delivered up the men of Belial in Gibeah and made them go up for judgment and trial.

Comment: The Benjamites should have done this *voluntarily* once they heard what was involved.

Reply: Yes. In addition, they refused to give the guilty ones over for judgment when asked by the other tribes to do so—and they even prepared for war. Thus they *defended* the evil.

Judges 20:15 And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men.

Judges 20:16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss.

Judges 20:17 And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war.

From the tribe of Benjamin, 26,700 men of war were numbered. From the other 11 tribes, 400,000 men of war were numbered. Although those of Benjamin were relatively few in comparison, they were very skilled as a tribe in warfare. Moreover, 700 of the numbered Benjamites were left-handed experts at slinging stones.

The men of Benjamin were unified, confident, and determined to fight with their small force. Their boldness shows how corrupt the tribe had become. To justify the men of Gibeah, the others were willing to take on all the other tribes in defending the wrong.

Judges 20:18 And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first.

Judges 20:19 And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah.

Judges 20:20 And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.

Judges 20:21 And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men.

Judges 20:22 And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day.

Judges 20:23 (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.)

Judges 20:24 And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.

Judges 20:25 And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.

The men of war of the 11 tribes asked counsel at the “house of God,” that is, at Bethel (see RSV). The Tabernacle was at Shiloh at this time, but the custom was for the judges to travel on circuits, or itineraries. For instance, they might go to Mizpeh and then Bethel. Sometimes the visiting judge carried the Ark of the Covenant with him. Bethel was apparently on one of the circuits, so the Israelites could ask counsel of God because the Ark was there. The answer to their inquiry was, “Yes, go fight, and of the tribes, Judah shall go up first.”

Accordingly, the Israelites encamped against Gibeah and fought, but they lost 22,000 men. Again the Israelites inquired of God; they “went up and wept before the LORD until even” and asked, “Shall we go up to battle against Benjamin, our brother?” Again the reply was, “Go up against Benjamin.” But in the battle the next day, 18,000 Israelites were killed. Now the number of slain was 40,000, or 10 percent of the original 400,000.

Judges 20:26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

Judges 20:27 And the children of Israel inquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,

Judges 20:28 And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

Judges 20:29 And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah.

Judges 20:30 And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.

Judges 20:31 And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, and kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

Judges 20:32 And the children of Benjamin said, They are smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways.

Judges 20:33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baal-tamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows of Gibeah.

Judges 20:34 And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil was near them.

Judges 20:35 And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.

Judges 20:36 So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.

Judges 20:37 And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.

Judges 20:38 Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.

Judges 20:39 And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as in the first battle.

Judges 20:40 But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven.

Judges 20:41 And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them.

Judges 20:42 Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which came out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them.

Judges 20:43 Thus they inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising.

Judges 20:44 And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valour.

Judges 20:45 And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them.

Judges 20:46 So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these were men of valour.

Judges 20:47 But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.

Judges 20:48 And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

The battle can be a little confusing because *two different* historical accounts of what happened on this occasion were put together. Part of the information was repeated, for instance, about the 30 Israelites who were killed and the retreat that was faked. The men of Gibeah followed the supposedly retreating Israelites out of the city and were led into an ambush at the same time that other Israelites set Gibeah on fire. Of the Benjamites, approximately 18,000, 5,000, and 2,000 were slain for a total of 25,100 men. Only 600 men survived, and they fled into the wilderness for four months. How many of them were men of war the account does not say, but only 600 males were left of the entire tribe of Benjamin.

Q: Why were the Israelites allowed to be defeated the first two times?

A: The antitypical lesson will be delayed until the end of the next chapter, but we will consider the natural lesson now. The 11 tribes also needed a lesson, for they had not been obeying the Law the way they should. While homosexuality was very pronounced in Gibeah, just as in Sodom earlier, this condition existed in the *nation*. However, in Gibeah, the problem was so concentrated that the men were emboldened in their sin.

Being next to Benjamin, Judah should have taken action sooner; that is, Judah should have combatted the evil *prior* to the incident with the Levite and the concubine. Stated another way, the tribe *nearest* the situation was responsible for taking action *first*.

The Lord saw fit that the Israelites should suffer two humiliating defeats before victory would come. The defeats were intended to cause them to reflect. Notice the sequence. (1) The Israelites asked counsel. (2) They went to battle and were defeated the first time. (3) The Israelites wept before the Lord and asked counsel again. (4) The Israelites were defeated the

second time. (5) The third time the Israelites wept, fasted, prayed, asked counsel, and offered peace and burnt offerings. This time God said, “Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver the Benjamites into your hand.” (6) The Israelites were victorious. In other words, there was victory after repentance on a *proper* basis—after doing things the *Lord’s* way. The first two days of casualties occurred to impress upon the nation that they had some responsibility in the matter because they had been lax in handling the homosexuality. But in the final sense, the severity of judgment came most heavily on the tribe of Benjamin, for only 600 men survived.

Judges 21:1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife.

Judges 21:2 And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore;

Judges 21:3 And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?

Judges 21:4 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Judges 21:5 And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to death.

Judges 21:6 And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.

Judges 21:7 How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?

What was the dilemma? So much of the tribe of Benjamin had been decimated that the other tribes thought it would die out. Only 600 males (men of war) remained, and they had no wives.

Q: This warfare occurred in the period when there was no king and every man did what was right in his own sight. In view of the grievous sin that had been committed, it was proper that the other tribes became incensed and went to war against Benjamin, as the Lord had indicated, but at this point, shouldn’t they have trusted the Lord to preserve Benjamin? Are the actions they took really warranted?

A: That is a hard question to answer since we were not back there. We do not see anything plainly wrong in some respects, and there is no comment in Scripture with regard to either the Lord’s approval or His disapproval. The account simply narrates the historic reason for the decimation of the tribe of Benjamin, which occurred prior to the era of the kings.

Q: Verse 6 says that the other tribes repented because of Benjamin, but the account does not say that the few survivors of Benjamin repented. Wouldn’t that be a factor?

A: It is hard to codify an answer. For instance, although the tribe of Benjamin was punished with divine retribution, that does not necessarily mean everyone in the tribe gave assent to homosexuality. It was just that this practice took place in one of Benjamin’s leading cities. No doubt, however, the practice existed in other areas as well, and the retribution was like a housecleaning. With so few remaining, the other tribes might have reasoned that divine

retribution was satisfied and that the 600 had been selected to survive, but they had no wives. Also, the 11 tribes had taken an oath that none of their daughters could marry Benjamites. Hence they now reasoned, "Unless we do something, the tribe of Benjamin will automatically die out. The other possibility is that the men will marry strangers and become contaminated."

Ezra inserted editorial comments when he codified the books of the Old Testament. Being very strict, he stated that there was no king and that all the Israelites were doing what was right in their own eyes. However, he left matters up in the air except to say that the Benjamites were punished, but certainly they were not living close to the Law, for otherwise, they would have known what to do in their dilemma. There was a laxity, but who was responsible for what? Since the Levites and the priesthood were responsible for religious teaching and behavior, more than just the Benjamites were involved. No doubt some Israelites fumed at the conditions that were beginning to exist, and when the Levite sent a cut-up piece of the concubine to each tribe, that act was the match that set on fire the tinderbox of their indignation.

Comment: The tribes were tenderhearted in their concern for Benjamin, for they "wept sore."

Judges 21:8 And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly.

Judges 21:9 For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead there.

Judges 21:10 And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children.

Judges 21:11 And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man.

Judges 21:12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

Judges 21:13 And the whole congregation sent some to speak to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them.

Judges 21:14 And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead: and yet so they sufficed them not.

Judges 21:15 And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

The 11 tribes wept and made burnt and peace offerings and were wondering what to do. Then someone suggested an idea that caught on; namely, wives would be procured from Jabesh-gilead for the 600 Benjamites. Jabesh-gilead was among the 2 1/2 tribes of Israel east of the Jordan River, and the Israelites there had not responded heartily to the proposal that the tribes cooperate in punishing Benjamin. In recalling this negligence, the 11 tribes now felt indignant that Jabesh-gilead had not considered cooperation to be their responsibility. Therefore, they decided to punish Jabesh-gilead and, at the same time, to procure wives for the Benjamites. (Perhaps a clarification is needed. Some volunteers from the 2 1/2 tribes participated in punishing Benjamin, but none came from the Jabesh-gilead area.) In visiting retribution on

Jabesh-gilead for their lack of cooperation, the 11 tribes decided that only the virgins were to be spared; all others were killed. By this method, 400 virgins were obtained, but since there were 600 Benjamite men, 200 more virgins were needed.

How was virginity determined? The women were captured, stripped, and examined to see if the hymen was broken. Those who were not virgins were put to death. As an interesting side note, there is a historic indication that idolatry was practiced in some form in Jabesh-gilead.

Judges 21:16 Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?

Judges 21:17 And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel.

Judges 21:18 Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin.

Judges 21:19 Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah.

Judges 21:20 Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards;

Judges 21:21 And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

Judges 21:22 And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty.

Here was a second solution to the problem. First, the thinking was, "We can visit a judgment on the ones in Jabesh-gilead who did not cooperate and thereby secure their daughters." This method resulted in 400 wives for the surviving Benjamite males. Now another method was used to procure wives for the remaining 200 men.

The dance of the daughters of Shiloh was a happy occasion that was performed annually to commemorate the crossing of the Red Sea in the Exodus and Miriam's song of deliverance. Since the Tabernacle was at Shiloh, the daughters were *Levites*, and it was logical for the Levites to honor Miriam, because she, too, was a Levite. When the Levite cut up his dead concubine and sent pieces to the tribes, they had all participated in the vow not to give their daughters to the Benjamites except the Levites and, of course, the Benjamites themselves. Hence the Levites would not be guilty of breaking the oath if their daughters married men from Benjamin. (Similarly, those of Jabesh-gilead did not violate the oath because they ignored it by not congregating with the other tribes.)

Therefore, according to plan, when the daughters of Shiloh came to dance, the 200 Benjamites who had no mate lay in ambush and then dashed out and grabbed a maiden. When the parents of the girls or other Levites protested, the Benjamite males would have reasoned, "In this dire circumstance, we need your daughters in order to preserve our tribe. Moreover, you did not take the oath, so you are not guilty of breaking it. Therefore, we would appreciate your not

making an undue fuss over what has happened. We ask you to wink the eye in view of our dilemma.”

The account gives a detailed description of where the dancing took place. It was like saying, “The plain on the right side of the road that leads from Bethel to Shechem is the site of the dancing.” In other words, the site could be pinpointed as the historical memorial place of the dancing. It was on the north side of Bethel and east of the highway that went from Bethel to Shechem, and Shiloh was just a little off the road between these two cities. That area can still be located today.

Comment: Women were not highly regarded in those days. This method of obtaining wives seems so strange to us.

Q: Another incident comes to mind. After Judas betrayed Jesus and died, the other apostles acted on their own to get a replacement so that there would again be 12 apostles. Here in chapter 21, there is no indication that the tribes got an answer from the Lord, and they did not even try to go through the Levites and the Tabernacle. Therefore, weren't they running ahead of the Lord, even if their actions were overruled in the final analysis so that the tribe of Benjamin did not die out?

A: The tribes should have exercised more faith, but their plan shows what can happen when people are not acquainted with the Lord's Word. On the one side of the scale, the tribes took certain liberties, but on the other side of the scale, they were indignant over the sin that had been committed.

And there is another point. The fact that the concubine had been associated with a *Levite* gave the 11 tribes reasoning leverage. Even though the maidens were abducted in the dance, the original grievance was brought about by one of their own tribe.

Also, when people are emotionally distraught, their reasoning and judgment are frequently not what they might be under normal circumstances. The realities of the result of an action should be thought out in advance. Of course there were some extenuating factors here, for there truly was a dilemma that needed solving. Certainly the Lord did not say that He approved of what happened, but neither did He say He disapproved—except for the hint that things were not exactly kosher; namely, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

In the past, the custom was very prevalent for a daughter not to have much input as to who her husband would be. The parents selected the man and then made a proffer to his family and negotiated. For a marriage to take place, practical benefits were seen for both families. Nevertheless, in a loving family, some consideration was given to the daughter, and there would have been a discussion and general agreement with regard to a marriage. Spiritually speaking, a mate should be chosen according to the will of the Heavenly Father.

Judges 21:23 And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them.

Judges 21:24 And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance.

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Comment: The Levites were not giving proper instruction.

Reply: Yes, that is true, as proven by the three addendums to the Book of Judges. In chapters 17 and 18, a Levite left Bethlehem of Judah and traveled north. In transit, he stopped at a private home for overnight lodging. When offered money, he remained there and became a salaried priest to that home. Subsequently some from the tribe of Dan left southern Israel to establish a settlement in the far north. When they heard about this Levite, they took him with them. In chapter 19, a Levite's concubine was abused to death by the Benjamites.

Comment: In a sense, then, it was right that some of the Levites' own daughters were taken as wives by 200 of the surviving men of the tribe of Benjamin. A little retribution was involved.

Reply: In addition, there was not the type of organization that should have existed through the Levitical arrangement. Not only was every man doing what was right in his own eyes, but every tribe was acting that way as well. The tribes were more or less independent except when a common enemy or a particular incident brought them together, as in the case of Benjamin's sin, which threatened to make inroads in all the tribes if the situation was not properly handled. Thus it took something on the outside to sort of unify the tribes, but the looseness and independence existed until David's day. Being organizationally minded, David arranged the 24 courses, or services, of the priesthood and knit the tribes together as a kingdom of the Lord.

Comment: Nevertheless, it was still noble and commendable on the part of the other tribes to be offended by the Benjamites' behavior. Some people would just shut their eyes to the situation.

Comment: Judges 20:1 proves that the Israelites in Transjordan knew about the sin in Benjamin and the call for men to fight. Not only does the account mention that Israel "gathered together as one man" from Dan to Beersheba, but also those in "the land of Gilead," that is, the 2 1/2 tribes east of the Jordan River, are specifically mentioned. Therefore, the men in Jabesh-gilead knew about the sin but declined to fight.

Reply: Yes, it was noticed that there were no volunteers from that area.

General Review of the Time Element

Since Samuel was the last judge, the intervening chapters following the account of Samson in the Book of Judges, plus the Book of Ruth through the end of Samuel's judgeship, all took place *during* the Period of the Judges. In other words, certain events occurred earlier in the judgeship period and not just after Samson. Chapters 17-21 of the Book of Judges are important, for they have a bearing on some of the practices that developed later on among the Israelites. These chapters go back to an early period in the beginning of the judgeship era.

Ruth 1:1 proves that the Book of Ruth took place in the Period of the Judges. "Now it came to pass *in the days when the judges ruled*, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons." The Book of Ruth tells about the ancestral line of not only Messiah but also David, who was of the line of Boaz. With the lineage being Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David, we see that Boaz was the great grandfather of David. Counting back the four generations proves that the story of Ruth took place near the end of the Period of the Judges, that is, about 400 years into the 450-year period. Therefore, the Book of Ruth is actually one of the addendums to the Book of Judges. The account bearing her name was made a separate book to honor her because the lesson is so lovely and also because she pictures the Gentile Church. In the beginning, the Church consisted mostly of Jews, but after AD 70, it became a Gentile Church with very, very few Jews. The

Apostle John, Timothy, and certain other Jews lived past AD 70 but were small in number.

General Observations

The sentiments of the majority more or less prevailed in the Period of the Judges, and isn't that the situation today as well? Doesn't the majority in the Bible Student movement or any other group or association usually influence the policy and direction of the movement itself? If certain principles go askew, matters pertaining to those principles cannot be dealt with effectively, in the Lord's way, because there is not the knowledge or the feeling of how things should be done properly. What we are trying to say is that today the brethren as a whole are not too knowledgeable on Scripture itself, but they are knowledgeable on Pastor Russell. We need the ministry of the Pastor as a dispensational servant, but we cannot set aside the Word of God. Many, many lessons that are in the Bible are not even in the *Reprints*, yet every word that comes out of the mouth of God is profitable. Jesus' statement that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" is a mandate for the Christian (Matt. 4:4). Sometimes things cannot be done properly because of the disorganization along certain lines, so we are in a dilemma today with effectively treating some conditions. The lesson, therefore, is not to set aside the Word of God. It is essential for the Christian to meditate, study, and try to live by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

Some do not like the following thought, but the Pastor showed that John the Baptist was a type of the Christian in the flesh at the end of the age, and John's words to Jesus were meaningful: "He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John was quite influential in the early part of the Harvest period at the end of the Jewish Age because almost all Jewry flocked to him to hear his message and be baptized. However, his popularity began to fade as Jesus was recognized little by little, and then more and more. Eventually thousands followed Jesus, and many who had been with John forsook him and went with Jesus. And so the Pastor said that in this illustration, Jesus represents the Church beyond the veil in the Harvest period at the end of the Gospel Age, and John the Baptist represents the Church in the flesh. As the Church in the flesh dies, the number increases beyond the veil, and the number of the John the Baptist class decreases on this side of the veil.

We are living more than 90 years after the Pastor's decease, so those of the Little Flock on the scene today would be a very small number indeed. In fact, the work is likened to a gleaning. A reasonably large percentage of Christians who lived during the first 40 years of the Harvest, when great numbers were in present truth, were zealous and no doubt faithful more-than-overcomers. The Pastor suggested that one-third of the Little Flock (48,000) will eventually make their calling and election sure in the present Harvest at the end of the age and that one-third were faithful in the early days of the Church at the beginning of the Gospel Age. He further suggested that only one-third were faithful during the long intervening period of time between the two harvests. Although his thinking was conjectural, there are scriptural clues that these estimates are correct. For instance, the message to the Sardis period of the Church was, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy" (Rev. 3:4).

When we look back on the history of the Truth movement, we see that many died in the 40 years between 1878 and 1918, but shortly after the Pastor died, the work of the movement changed *radically*. The Johnsonites believed the high calling had ceased. The Stand Fast movement thought there would be no new membership in the high calling. The Society, or Watchtower, the largest group, also did not believe the high calling was still open. Oh, yes, they grudgingly admitted that there might be a few, but the vast majority of their membership were not considered eligible. The publications of these groups were not oriented for the development of those who had aspirations for the high calling. The emphasis was mostly on

witness work, which encouraged the public that they might live through the Time of Trouble. There was no emphasis on the heavenly calling to be with Jesus. Thus, from 1918 up until the present time, only a gleaning work has been going on.

The “management” of the three named organizations has influenced the thinking of the members. Because the dispensing of spiritual food in a liberal fashion has greatly diminished, the spirituality dwindles little by little. However, this trend should not discourage us, for the Scriptures indicate that such would be the condition at the end of the age. Those with spiritual hopes should continue on with patience and with the expectation and hope that, if faithful, they will get a crown. Meanwhile, fewer and fewer replacements are getting the necessary spiritual knowledge, so the situation is providentially working both ways. The Lord has allowed the unfavorable situation to exist in “management,” in the teaching element, but He makes sure that those who should get the food will receive it. God raises up a sufficient number of servants wherever they are needed in the world.

Therefore, in a nutshell, the condition of everyone doing what is right in his own eyes is somewhat the condition today because there is no respected central authority. Brethren read Pastor Russell’s writings and draw all kinds of conclusions, but which interpretations are correct must be discerned by each individual. We must analyze what we hear and read, pray for understanding, and look for Jesus’ voice, for the Master said, “My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27). The Holy Spirit is the guiding hand of those who are fed in the proper manner. Back in Old Testament times, the Period of the Judges was followed by the Period of the Kings, and conditions are similar today; namely, the judging or testing period is followed by the kingship era, the Kingdom. The Israelites were faithful during all the days of Joshua—the beginning of judges, as it were. Christians were faithful in the days of the apostles—the beginning judges of the gospel era. In fact, the first period of the Church was called Ephesus, meaning “desirable.” Thus there is a correspondency between the historical Book of Judges and the later kingship period on the one hand, and the testing period of the Gospel Age and the soon-to-come kingship era on the other hand.