



THE DAYS OF THE JUDGES

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INTRODUCTION

In St. Paul's first recorded sermon he measured the period of Israel's history when they were governed by judges as spanning "about the space of 450 years" (Acts 13:20). Despite the obscurity of this period there are relevant lessons for modern believers. The human frailty of forsaking the Lord in times of blessing and prosperity, and turning to the Lord when danger and adversity prevails is a tendency still evident in human nature today. If we learn to seek the Lord steadfastly whether blessed or afflicted the message of the book of Judges will be worthwhile. Another important and relevant lesson is the example set forth of the need of humanity to be governed. There was no king in Israel and everyone did as he pleased. That is a description of anarchy. Modern democracy is little better for if the will of the majority is not based upon true moral ethics there is no foundation to that form of government. We need a king or a governor or an authority to rule and guide us. God will so rule us by His Word and Spirit if we will have it so.

The first 16 chapters cover the political history of Israel. Chapters 17-21 take us back in time and reveal the terrible degenerate social conditions which result from everyone doing what is right in his own eyes. The beautiful story of Ruth took place somewhere in the last half of the days of the judges. Samuel, the last judge was the most effective of them all and became the first of the prophets in a new forward move of God in His progressive revelation. Truly the time of the Judges contain many lessons for contemporary Christians.

These lessons were written for the Emmanuel Pentecostal Sunday School by the pastor, Robert D. Kalis. This is the ninth in a series of twenty quarterlies (5 years) covering the greater part of the historical portion of the Bible. This series is now complete. The titles are listed below and are available to any and all:

The Men and Women of Genesis	The Miracles of Jesus
Lessons From Exodus	The Parables of Jesus
Wilderness Examples	The Personal Ministry of Jesus
Possessing the Land of Promise	According to Luke - I & II
The Days of the Judges	We Beheld His Glory (John-I)
Israel's Early Kings	Full of Grace & Truth (John-II)
Lessons From the Kings	Holy Ghost Acts - I
The Captivity and Return	Holy Ghost Acts - II
Matthew: The King and His Kingdom - I & II	

THE LORD RAISED UP JUDGES

(Othniel, Ehud, & Shamgar)

Read: Judges 1,2 & 3; Numbers 33:50-56

Memory Work: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *If we fail to overcome the faults in our natures they will cause us grief and loss later on.*
2. *Just as the Israelites were required to keep separate from the ungodly inhabitants of Canaan, the Christians are called to come out from fellowship with the world and to be separate.*
3. *God can use those whom the world despises. The Spirit of the Lord can make the weak and timid, strong and bold.*
4. *Despite our failures and foolish mistakes, the Lord hears and helps when we call upon Him in the time of trouble.*

I The Space of Four Hundred Fifty Years: The book of Judges covers a period of 450 years. From the call of Abraham to leave his father's land until the exodus from Egypt was 430 years. Then there were forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Then six years until the division of the land and fourteen years until the rise of Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia. Against this man's oppression the Lord raised up Othniel, Caleb's son-in-law, as the first of the judges to deliver Israel. The oppression of Chushan-rishathaim marks the beginning of the era of the judges which continued the space of 450 years (see Acts 13:20). This era ended with the 20 year judgeship of Samuel after which Israel chose to be like the other nations around them and made Saul their king. When one considers that the United States as a nation is just a little more than 200 years old, it helps one to understand what a great period of time is covered by the period of the judges.

Both the books of Joshua and Judges have a way of recapitulating what has already been recorded. At least three times the conquest of Hebron is recorded with the slaying of the three giants, Talmai, Ahiman and Sheshai. The first seventeen chapters of Judges give the political history of Israel, their vacillation between idolatry, and repentance and return to the Lord. The narrative ends with the judgeship of Samson. Chapters 18-21 take us back to sometime in that period and tell the story of the social life in Israel. These chapters emphasize the fact that there was no king in Israel (God's reign was rejected) and every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Following the book of Judges we have the beautiful story of Ruth the Moabitess. The events recorded in the book of Ruth also took place sometime in the latter half of the period of the judges. Eli and Samuel were the last judges of that era which spans the 450 years mentioned in Acts 13:20.

II Israel's Failure: The Lord had warned Israel as they approached the promised land that they must drive out all the inhabitants of the land. All of the pictures and molten images and high places were to be totally destroyed. "If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you," the Lord warned Moses, "then it shall come to pass that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides and shall vex you" (Numbers 33:55).

Under Joshua's leadership Israel had won great victories. Many kings were overthrown and cities and territories conquered. But the conquest of the land was never really completed. Benjamin failed to drive out the Jebusites from the city of Jerusalem (Judges 1:21). The house of Joseph did not utterly slay the Hittites (vs. 26). Manasseh failed to drive the Canaanites out of many of the towns in its inheritance (vs.27). Because Israel had the upper hand they forced these inhabitants to pay tribute but they did not do as God had commanded them: they did not utterly destroy the wicked inhabitants of the land. The tribes of Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali, all failed to complete the conquest of their territories. Dan was forced by the Amorites to abandon the fertile valleys and live in the mountains. When an angel of the Lord came to Israel to reprove them for their carelessness they were moved to tears but not enough to go to work and finish the job of utterly slaying and driving out the inhabitants of the land.

When the restraining influence of Joshua was gone, Israel soon forsook and forgot the Lord and began to bow down to

Baalim and Ashteroth and served these gods of the people that were around about them. The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and He delivered them to spoilers who robbed them and finally overcame them. They could no longer stand before their enemies. These enemies who should have been utterly destroyed, now strengthened themselves and, just as the Lord had warned, became pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides. Instead of enjoying the fruitfulness and blessings of the promised land the people of Israel had to live in fear of those whom they should have conquered.

In the Christian life, we too are charged to overcome those things in our natures which are enemies to the life in the Spirit. These victories should be won quickly and completely. If these enemies are not conquered they rise up to haunt the believer. Pride, covetousness, and lust are enemies which must be dealt with and utterly destroyed. When not destroyed these sins rob and oppress the Christians. The joy of salvation is lost. Confidence in prayer is forfeited. Fear and guilt sap the vitality of the victorious Christian life the Lord intends for us. If we don't get the victory over moods and depression when we are young we will be hard to live with when we get older. If generosity does not conquer covetousness early in life, that vice will dominate and impoverish our spiritual life in later years. If lust is not displaced by purity, disaster will be the inevitable result. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Let us pursue and utterly destroy every vestige of the old life of the flesh. And let us get these victories early enough in life that there might be abundant and fulfilling fruitfulness.

III The Lord Raised Up Judges: The story of Israel during this period of their history is repetitious. When they forsook the Lord, He forsook them. The enemies prevailed and oppressed Israel until they cried unto the Lord. Then in mercy He raised up a judge to restore the people to fellowship with God and lead them to victory against their enemies. As soon as the oppressors were subdued Israel would again rebel against the Lord and refuse to hearken to their judge. Then the whole process would be repeated in each generation.

Othniel, the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb was the first of these judges. When Israel served Baalim and indulged in the immoral practices in the idolatrous groves, the Lord "sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim, the king of Mesopotamia." He oppressed Israel for eight years. In their distress Israel

cried to the Lord and He mercifully raised up a deliverer for them. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel. He went out to war against the oppressor and the Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim into his hand. For forty years the children of Israel had peace and prosperity until they once again forsook the Lord.

When Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, He strengthened Eglon the king of Moab to oppress Israel. This wicked king formed a confederation with the children of Ammon and Amalek and took "the city of palm trees." For eighteen long years the children of Israel suffered at the hands of this obese tyrant. Finally, they cried unto the Lord and He raised up a deliverer from the tribe of Benjamin; Ehud, the son of Gera. This man was left-handed. In those days a left-handed man was considered useless for battle and warfare, yet God chose him and even used his so-called handicap. Israel sent a present to pacify their oppressor, Eglon. Ehud was the messenger who brought the present. He craftily strapped a long dagger to his right thigh. When he had delivered the present to the oppressor, he said that he had a secret errand to the king. Whereupon, the king sent all from him. Ehud then said that he had a message from God for Eglon and drew near to the King. The message was "special delivery." Ehud took the dagger with his left hand and plunged it into the fat belly of the unsuspecting tyrant. The blade and handle disappeared in the fat and Ehud could not draw the dagger out again. He left by the porch and locked the windows and doors behind him. The confusion and consternation left behind at the king's court is somewhat humorous and best read for yourself. Meanwhile Ehud blew a trumpet and summoned Israel to battle. "Follow after me," Ehud cried, "for the Lord hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." They blocked the ford at Jordan and slew of the Moabites ten thousand valiant warriors. So the Lord was able to use the awkward left-handed Benjamite to bring great deliverance to Israel. There followed the longest period of rest that Israel ever enjoyed during the days of the judges: 80 years.

The next judge was Shamgar, He delivered Israel from the oppression of the Philistines and is remembered for the remarkable accomplishment of slaying 600 men with an ox goad. "He also delivered Israel." God's mercy in responding when Israel cried to Him is worthy of consideration for even today He responds so readily when we call upon Him. Only let us not forsake Him in time of prosperity.

DEBORAH ARISES -- A MOTHER IN ISRAEL

Read: Judges 4 & 5

Memory Work: Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Psalm 46:2

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The Lord allowed enemies to oppress Israel when they did evil in His sight.*
2. *The passing of a great leader or man of God ought not to occasion any letdown on our part of following the Lord.*
3. *To seek the interest and support of godly individuals for our ministry, as Barak sought the help of godly Deborah, is very wise.*
4. *Those who cooperated with the work of God and willingly offered themselves were duly noted and blessed but those who refused to help were cursed. We ought to willingly offer ourselves to God for His work.*
5. *One individual, full of faith and wisdom, can bring blessing and deliverance to a whole nation.*

I Under the Palm Tree: After the eighty years of rest which resulted from the deliverance wrought by Ehud over the Moabites, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. While Ehud lived, his influence must have held Israel true to the Lord. As soon as he was dead Israel fell into evil once again (ch.4:1). During the next twenty years, the Lord allowed the enemies of Israel to gain the upper hand over them. The Philistines and the Canaanites particularly oppressed the people of God. Shamgar's heroic feat of slaying six hundred Philistines with nothing more than an ox goad took place during this time. No particular years are assigned to his judgeship.

The oppression by the Canaanites became very intense. Jabin, the king of these enemies, reigned in Hazor. The general of his army was Sisera. The army was made formidable by the use of nine hundred chariots of iron. For twenty years Jabin mightily oppressed Israel. So intense was this oppression that the main roads were unused. Travellers walked through the back roads (ch.5:6). The high riding Canaanites took away the weapons from Israel so that among forty thousand men of Israel one spear and shield could scarcely be found (ch.5:8).

Finally, in their desperate condition Israel woke up. They put away the strange gods and called on the Lord for deliverance. How merciful the Lord was to His people! At once He raised up a prophetess judge for them. She was the wife of Lapidoth of the tribe of Ephraim. Her fame was spread abroad throughout Israel and they came to her for judgment. She dwelt under a tree which became known as the palm tree of Deborah, for that was her name. Her ministry, being a prophetess, must have restored many of the backsliders of Israel, to a right relationship with their God. This was the necessary first step for deliverance from the horrible oppression. Let us be sure that all is well in our relationship with the Lord. Let there be no secret sins; no serving of the gods of materialism and lust. Then we may expect full deliverance from the oppression of the enemy.

II Up: For This is the Day: From her palm tree headquarters Deborah sent for Barak the son of Abinoam out of the town of Kedesh in the tribe of Naphtali. She had the word of the Lord and told Barak that God had commanded that he take ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun toward mount Tabor. God promised to draw Jabin's general, Sisera, with his chariots and multitudes, to the river Kishon where He would deliver them into the hand of Barak. His response was to require that Deborah herself accompany the expedition. Now Barak is often scorned for his timidity in the face of the promise of God for refusing to go unless the prophetess-judge went with him. But perhaps he is to be commended for his discernment in realizing the value of such a woman who could give him instructions from the mouth of God. Instead of condemning him for his supposed timidity, we would do well to learn from him the value of association with such as possess the wisdom of God.

Deborah readily agreed to go with Barak but foretold that the honor of eliminating Sisera would go to a woman. Barak was more interested in deliverance than in who received the honor. So Barak summoned the men of Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh and

Deborah accompanied the expedition there also. When Sisera learned that Barak had assembled an army near Mount Tabor he gathered his army with all nine hundred chariots at the river Kishon. The Lord had said that He would draw Jabin's army to the river Kishon (ch.4:7). That is exactly what happened.

The word of the Lord came to Deborah for 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?" (4:14). Surely Barak made no mistake in bringing this woman with him. Inspired by the word of the Lord, Barak launched the attack. From Mount Tabor he descended with his ten thousand men. The battle went in Israel's favor from the very start. The Canaanites were "discomfited" before the men of Israel. Even the iron chariots could not stand before the inspired warriors of Barak and Israel. Sisera, the mighty general, fled from his chariot on foot. Barak and his army pursued after the fleeing chariots and caught and slew every last enemy (4:16). Such a total rout of superior forces would be hard to comprehend were it not for the explanation contained in the song of Deborah (ch.5).

The Lord "drew" Sisera and the chariots to the river Kishon with purpose. There, as Barak attacked a sudden storm was unleashed. Thunder caused the earth to shake. The dark clouds blotted out sun, moon and stars, confusing the alien soldiers as to their direction. The rain softened the ground so that the chariot wheels sank into the mud. The horses too, with their small hoofs sank in the deep mire and so could not pull the chariots with any speed. Israel's footmen were able to pursue and destroy the warriors of Sisera in their chariots. Finally, the storm created a flash flood and the river to which the Lord had drawn Sisera and his chariots became a raging torrent which swept away the remaining chariots and Canaanites (see verses 4,20,21, & 22).

As for Sisera himself, he deserted his men to save his own life. On foot he fled to the tent of Heber the Kenite. This man was a descendant of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses and there was peace between the Kenites and King Jabin. The wife of Heber was Jael. She met Sisera and offered him sanctuary in her tent. He asked for water and she gave him milk. He instructed her to stand in the entrance of her tent and deny that any man was within should some pursuer inquire of her. Exhausted, the defeated general lay down to sleep and Jael covered him with a blanket. When he was sound asleep (and probably snoring loudly) Jael took a hammer and nail of the

tent and softly went to him. With sudden action she drove the nail with the hammer right through the sleeping general's temples and into the ground. As Barak was pursuing his enemy, he was met by Jael who came out to meet him. She took him to the scene where Barak found Sisera dead and fastened to the ground by a nail which had been hammered through his temples. As Deborah had prophesied the honor went to a woman. The important fact was that the power of Jabin and the Canaanites was destroyed and soon the yoke of these enemies was thrown off and Jabin himself destroyed. Then the land enjoyed forty years of blessed rest.

III Then Sang Deborah and Barak: The glorious victory was cause for rejoicing. Deborah and Barak sang a duet in ballad form inspired by the Spirit of God. The story of the battle and deliverance is included in the song. There are also notable blessings and cursings in its message. The men of Naphtali and Zebulun who willingly offered themselves are blessed and praised. Zebulun and Naphtali are commended because their men jeopardized their lives for the cause of God (5:18). Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh (Machir) and Issachar are commended for their cooperation with Barak. But Rueben, Gilead, Dan and Asher are condemned for not coming to help in the battle. Meroz is cursed outright for refusing to come "to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (see 5:15-17,23). Jael, also is blessed above women while the mother of Sisera is mocked (see 6:24-27 & 28-30).

Let us learn the lesson of willingly offering ourselves to fight the battles of the Lord. While all cannot preach, all can pray and testify. Let there be no loss of reward because of timidity or cowardice or excuses of any kind. Come let us fight the battles of the Lord and then we, too, will have cause to sing the praises of our Lord who will enable us to conquer every enemy.

GIDEON OVERCOMES THE MIDIANITES

Read: Judges 6-7-8

Memory Work: Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. Psalm 46:3

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Before God can use us to bring victory and blessing to His people we must cleanse our own house from evil.*
2. *When we obey the Lord and follow His guidance, He can win great victories with few followers.*
3. *God gives us spiritual weapons and by them great and lasting victories may be won.*
4. *The same Spirit of God which came upon Gideon can be the portion of every believer and give that power which is needed to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil.*

I Piety Begins At Home: After the restoration of Israel through the ministry of Deborah and the military victory of Barak, the people of God enjoyed forty years of rest. Then the children of Israel forsook the Lord and did evil in His sight once again. They began to worship the idol gods of the inhabitants of the land. So the Lord delivered Israel into the power of the Midianites. In the days of Moses, the Midianites, with the Moabites, had caused Israel great harm and grief through the counsel of Baalam (see Num.22:4 & 25:16-18). God had instructed Israel to destroy these enemies but Israel was content to coexist with them. Now they had grown very numerous and strong. They began to oppress the people of God. When harvest time came they raided the farms of Israel and stole the crops. They also took the flocks and herds of Israel for themselves. Many of the people of Israel went into hiding. They lived in the mountains and caves and inaccessible rocks of the wilderness. All this occurred because Israel did not obey the word of the Lord to

utterly destroy these enemies and because they forsook the Lord God and served the idol gods of the Canaanites. When the Midianites came like a swarm of locusts and devoured all of Israel's sustenance for seven years, they finally cried unto the Lord.

How merciful and patient the Lord is with His people! Immediately He sent a prophet to them. This messenger reminded Israel how God had delivered them from the oppression of Egypt and how He had given them this land and enabled them to drive out the evil inhabitants. The prophet recalled that God had warned Israel not to fear and serve the gods of these inhabitants. But the testimony of the Lord was, "but ye have not obeyed my voice" (Judges 6:10).

The next move of God in response to Israel's cry to Him was to send an angel to Gideon the son of Joash, a descendant of Joseph, of the tribe of Manasseh. Gideon was secretly threshing wheat, hiding his activity from the Midianites when the angel appeared to him. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor," the angel declared (ch.6:12). It must have sounded like mocking to Gideon who was hiding from the Midianites. "If the Lord be with us," Gideon inquired, "why then is all this befallen us?" He asked the messenger why there were no miracles of deliverance now like when Israel was delivered from Egypt. "Go in this thy might," the angel of the Lord said, "and thou shalt save Israel from the hands of the Midianites." When Gideon protested that his family was obscure in the tribe of Manasseh and he the least of his father's children, the angel of the Lord gave him a second and wonderful promise: "Surely I will be with thee and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man" (6:16).

So Gideon reluctantly accepted the commission from the Lord. He brought food to the angel of the Lord who touched it with the end of his staff and consumed it with fire. Gideon was frightened by this manifestation but was reassured by the Lord and he called the place Jehovah-shalom: the Lord send peace.

That same night, the Lord again spoke to Gideon. The newly commissioned leader was instructed to throw down the altar to Baal which his own father had built. Accordingly, Gideon took 10 servants and broke down the idolatrous altar by night. Before God could give Gideon the victories over the Midianites, the idols and sins of his own home had to be cleaned up. Even so, before the Lord can use us to minister to others and bring deliverance from the bondage of sin to those in need, our own lives must be cleaned up, and the idols

broken down. One who will serve the Lord and be a teacher of others must rule his own home and children well (see I Timothy 3:1-3).

II Too Many: After Gideon had broken down the altar of Baal in obedience to the word of the Lord, the Spirit of God came upon him. The marginal reading of this text is: "The Spirit of the Lord clothed himself with Gideon." In old testament times such an occurrence was very rare and noteworthy. Today every believer may be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. Gideon blew a trumpet and the men of Manasseh followed him. He sent messengers to the tribes of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, and they too sent volunteers.

Some doubt still lurked in Gideon's mind and he asked the Lord to give him a sign that Israel would triumph under his leadership. Gideon proposed to set a fleece of wool on the ground overnight. If, in the morning, the fleece was wet with dew, and the rest of the ground was dry, he would be assured that God was with him. In the morning he awoke to find exactly what he had stipulated. Gideon wrung a bowl full of water from the fleece, and then begged the Lord to grant him one more sign. This time he requested a reversal of the action. That night the dew soaked the ground but the fleece remained dry. To this day "believers" often "put out a fleece," in asking God for a sign of confirmation regarding some proposed action.

The response to Gideon's call to arms was good. Thirty-two thousand men volunteered. The Midianites outnumbered them about four to one for they had at least 135,000 men of war (see ch.8:10). Still, the Lord said the men with Gideon were too many. If victory was won with this army they would take credit to themselves. First, opportunity was given to all who were fearful to return home. Astonishingly, twenty-two thousand went home. Still there were too many. At the Lord's instruction Gideon took his men to the brook for a drink. Only those few who kept one hand alertly on their swords while they lapped the water drawn from the brook with the other hand were chosen for this elite corps of troops. Those so chosen, numbered 300. "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you," the Lord promised Gideon, and the rest of the volunteers were to be sent home.

With that small handful of men against such an army Gideon still quite naturally had some fear. The Lord told him to steal down to the camp of the Midianites and listen to their

conversation. This he did and was greatly encouraged to hear that the fear of God had fallen upon the Midianites. Gideon overheard their conversation which betrayed their attitude that God had already delivered the host of Midian into the hand of Gideon. Encouraged and filled with confidence, the Lord's deliverer returned to his camp to arm his men for the battle.

III The Weapons of Our Warfare: Strange equipment was issued to these soldiers. Each one of the 300 received 3 items: a lamp, an empty pitcher, and a trumpet. Gideon instructed his men to do as he did. The men were divided into three companies and they surrounded the camp of the Midianites on three sides. The burning lamps were covered by the empty pitchers. In the middle of the night Gideon gave the signal and the 300 chosen men blew their trumpets and smashed the pitchers and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Then they just stood still in their places. The Midianites awakened, and startled by the sudden clamor, became completely confused. They began to slash each other with their swords. Thus while Israel stood still and waited, the Midianites destroyed themselves. When they broke camp and began to flee, Israel pursued. With the morning light thousands of Israelites joined in the pursuit. Gideon sent word to Ephraim to blockade the waters of Jordan and prevent the escape of the enemy. There, the Ephraimites caught two of the princes of Midian; Oreb and Zeeb, and beheaded them. Gideon and his 300 pursued Zebah and Zalmunna the two kings of the Midianites and the 15,000 troops which remained. One hundred and twenty thousand had been destroyed. The last of the Midianites were destroyed with these two kings and God gave rest to Israel, for forty years.

The lamp within the pitcher is a picture of the Presence of the Lord in our bodies. Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. The shout of faith and our praises are our trumpets to sound the victors' march in this present age. Praise God for the weapons we are given by the Spirit, which "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds!"

JEPHTHAH SMITES THE AMMONITES

Read: Judges 9, 10, 11, & 12

Memory Work: There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. Psalm 46:4

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The enemy of our souls still attempts to rob us of our spiritual inheritance.*
2. *Jephthah, like Jesus, was rejected by his brethren and nation, only to become their head later on.*
3. *Despite the unfortunate circumstances of his birth and early history, Jephthah developed into a God-fearing and wise leader.*
4. *The vows we make unto the Lord in time of need or distress must be fulfilled.*

I The Background: Gideon who also was known as Jerubbaal, which means "contender with Baal," had seventy sons of many wives (see ch.8:30). He also had at least one other son named Abimelech, by his maidservant and concubine (see 8:31 & 9:18). When Gideon died in a good old age (8:32), Abimelech enlisted the support of his mother's relatives, and usurped the place of leadership in Shechem. He then went to Ophrah, the home of his father Gideon and killed all of the seventy sons of Gideon except for Jotham, the youngest, who escaped by hiding himself. Jotham went to Mount Gerizim and with an eloquent parable (9:8-15) pronounced a curse on both the usurper, Abimelech, and on the men of Shechem who supported his bloody coup. After three years (9:22), the curse was fulfilled. Abimelech turned against the Shechemites and killed them with the sword and burned those who remained when he trapped them in a tower. When Abimelech attempted to burn another tower at Thebez, a woman threw down a heavy piece of millstone right on Abimelech's head. The dying usurper compelled his armourbearer to slay him with spear or sword so that the disgrace of being slain by a woman should not be his lot.

After Abimelech, Tola judged Israel for twenty-three years, and then Jair, a Gileadite, judged Israel for twenty-two years. Once again the children of Israel fell into idolatry. They worshipped all the gods of the nations which they had once subdued. This seems the ultimate stupidity, but Israel not only fell into it, but repeated their idiocy over and over again. The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and He allowed the Philistines and the Ammonites to vex and oppress them. The two and one half tribes on the east side of Jordan felt the oppression of the Ammonites for eighteen years. When the children of Ammon crossed Jordan and fought against Judah and Benjamin and Ephraim, Israel finally woke up and realized their sin. Then they cried unto the Lord. But the Lord remonstrated with Israel, reminding them how He had delivered them from the Egyptians, Amorites, Philistines, and the children of Ammon, as well as from the Zidonians and Amalekites, yet the foolish children of Israel had forsaken Him, their deliverer, and served the gods of these nations which could not stand before the Lord God of Israel. "I will deliver you no more," the Lord threatened. "Go cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation," He said. But Israel humbled themselves and put away the strange gods from among them and so moved the Lord to pity them (9:16). So the children of Israel gathered together at Mizpeh to resist the Ammonites who were assembled in Gilead. They lacked a leader, however, and despite the offer of political power no volunteers offered to lead Israel.

II God's Man: There was a Gileadite who was a mighty man of valor. But this valiant leader had been exiled by his own brothers and the elders of Gilead. Gilead had been the father of Jephthah, but his mother was a harlot. When the legitimate sons of Gilead were grown and their father died, they cast Jephthah out and would not share the inheritance with him. The rejected son fled from Gilead and his brethren, and lived in exile in the land of Tob. There he became a leader of a band of outcasts and made a name and reputation for himself. Now in their extremity, the elders of Gilead had to "eat crow" and appeal to this exiled son of a harlot. The elders invited Jephthah to be their captain to fight against the children of Ammon. Jephthah inquired the reason for calling for him now after they had showed hatred for him before when they chased him from his father's house. "Why do ye come to me now when ye are in distress," he asked? Their reply was that they

needed his leadership against Ammon. Jephthah asked them, if he was successful with the Lord's help, would he still be their captain? Often, when an emergency passes, we forget our promises and vows. Jephthah wanted a commitment beforehand. The elders promised with an oath, (the Lord be witness), whereupon Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead to Mizpeh. There he was formally made captain, and there he "uttered all his words before the Lord."

This son of a harlot woman, born out of wedlock, and ostracized from society by his brethren and peers, became a remarkable man. Despite the unpromising background, Jephthah clearly was a man of faith. He is included in Hebrews 11 in the list of heroes of faith (Heb.11:32). He found a way, when all Israel had forsaken the Lord, to keep open communication with the Lord. He brought his requests and problems to the Lord. He also was astonishingly well taught in the history of Israel. His ability to overcome the bitterness of rejection puts him in a class with Joseph, and his leadership of the band of outcasts in Tob (Syria) is comparable with that of David at the cave of Adullam. The grace of God is able to take the worst of sinners and lift them from the miry pit and the dung hill of their background and environment, making them to sit with princes; indeed His power can so change the lost sinner as to make him a king and a priest unto God the Father.

III Negotiations: Before going to war, Jephthah wisely attempted to settle the dispute peacefully. He asked the king of Ammon first of all why he had invaded Israel's territory. The king sent word in answer to Jephthah's inquiry that Israel had taken their land when they came out of Egypt. Jephthah, who knew his history very well, explained that Israel had requested permission to pass through the territory of Moab and Ammon in those long passed days. He informed the king that even when refused permission to pass, the Israelites travelled through the wilderness around that territory. Barred from entering the promised land by Sihon king of the Ammorites, Israel was compelled to do battle with him, and the Lord God of Israel delivered the Amorites, who at that time controlled the territory now under dispute, into the hands of Israel. Since the Lord God of Israel had given them this territory, Jephthah reasoned, the Ammonites should possess that territory which Chemosh, their god, gave to them. Another point Jephthah made was that since the king of Moab had never made an attempt to regain his territory, why should Ammon presume to do so. Finally, the

brilliant leader of Israel pointed out that three hundred years had elapsed since Israel had taken possession of this territory and any legitimate claim would have had to have been made long ago. Despite these arguments, the king of Ammon would not be persuaded to leave off his invasion of Israel, and so war became inevitable.

IV The Vow and the Battle: When the negotiations failed, then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. The Spirit brought enablement to this man of faith. He dealt with the Lord for His help, and vowed that if the Lord would give him the full victory, when he returned to his home in Mizpeh in peace, "whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me shall surely be the Lord's, or, I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (ch.11:31 marg.). So Jephthah went to the battle against the children of Ammon and the Lord delivered them into his hand. He drove the enemy from twenty cities and with a very great slaughter, subdued the Ammonites before the children of Israel.

When he returned to his home in peace he had not forgotten his vow. He was not prepared, however, for what transpired. Who or what he expected to come forth from the doors of his home to meet him is not clear. When his daughter and only child joyfully ran to meet him with timbrel and dance, he rent his garment and told her of his oath. Now it is certain that such an astute man as Jephthah did not burn her up on an altar. Such a thing would be totally displeasing to the Lord who hated human sacrifice. What Jephthah did, and his wonderful daughter wholeheartedly agreed to, was to dedicate her wholly to the Lord. She, no doubt, went to the tabernacle and there remained unmarried to the day of her death. This grieved Jephthah so because he would have no heir. The marginal readings give the sense that four days of the year the daughters of Israel went to talk with the daughter of Jephthah. The vow Jephthah made was not a rash vow at all. He judged Israel for six years and stands as an encouragement to those from unfortunate backgrounds that God can transform the least promising of us into sons and daughters of God and fit us to serve Him and win victories for His kingdom.

SAMSON: STRONG BUT WEAK

Read: Judges 13,14,15, & 16

Memory Work: God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. Psalm 46:5

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The Spirit of the Lord brings us the power we need to fight the battles of the Lord and to overcome temptation.*
2. *The parents' faith and example are very important for their children.*
3. *Just as there was a relationship of Samson's Nazarite vow to his physical strength, so there is a definite connection between a believer's spiritual strength and his personal holiness before the Lord.*
4. *Failure to overcome his besetting sin, cost Samson his eyes, his reputation, and the total victory for Israel. Even so, if we fail to win the victory over the faults in our natures, not only will we suffer personal loss and guilt, but the whole church may suffer as well.*

I A Nazarite Unto God: After Jephthah died, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel for seven years. Next, Eglon of the tribe of Zebulun judged the people of God for ten years (see ch.12:8-15). But Israel once again fell into evil ways and the Lord allowed the Philistines to oppress them for forty years.

During this oppression an angel appeared to the wife of Manoah. This family lived in Zorah in the tribe of Dan. The woman was unable to bear her husband a child, but now the angelic visitor promised her an heir. She was instructed to drink no wine nor eat any unclean thing, for the son which she would bear was to be a Nazarite from his mother's womb. The rules regarding those who made vows of separation to the Lord are described in Numbers 6. Most Nazarites voluntarily vowed to separate themselves to the Lord for a brief period

of time. Three Bible characters were lifetime Nazarites: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. All three were born under miraculous circumstances. The separation vows included abstinence from wine and the fruit of the vine in any form; allowing the hair of head and beard to grow without cutting or trimming; and avoiding contact with anything unclean, especially a dead body.

When the angel instructed the wife of Manoah, he told her not to drink wine nor strong drink, and not to eat anything unclean (ch.13:4). This is a very suggestive instruction. Today, women carrying unborn babies are warned against strong drink, drugs, and the use of tobacco. It has been found that these things harm the physical well-being of the unborn babe and that often for life. Spiritual consequences also may easily be understood to affect the child's spiritual nature either for good or evil according to the conduct of the mother. This is worthy of serious consideration. In the case of Elisabeth and of John the Baptist, the babe was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. Does this not suggest that if a mother lives in the Spirit during the months she carries her child that the anointing of the Holy Spirit will possibly be upon her child as well?

Manoah was not present when the angel first spoke to his wife. He entreated the Lord that he, too, might speak with the messenger. The Lord heard and the visit was repeated for Manoah's benefit. He brought food to the angel and asked his name. The messenger asked why Manoah wanted to know his name, since it was a secret. The marginal alternate reading for "secret" is "wonderful". The angel caused fire to consume the food and then he ascended out of their sight in the flame. This caused Manoah fear and he concluded they would both die because they had seen the Lord (13:22). His wife had a little more sense and logically reasoned that if they were about to die, the Lord would not have made known to them the blessed event about to occur. When the child was born according to the promise, he was named Samson. The Lord blessed him while he grew up and soon the Spirit of the Lord began to move him.

II Strengthened With Might by the Spirit: Of John the Baptist, it was revealed: "he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink: and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). It was very much the same with Samson. The Spirit of God began to move him while he still was a growing

lad. At least four times, we read that the Spirit came mightily upon him. These two stories taken with the inspired advice of Paul to the church at Ephesus: "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit," (Eph.5:18) ought to be enough to deliver every follower of Christ from the temptation to indulge in intoxicating drink. Clearly, the strength of Samson came, not from the long hair and abstinence, but from the power of the Spirit which could come upon him because of his abstinence.

One day a lion attacked Samson, but the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him and he tore the lion up as if it had been a baby goat. Later he found a swarm of bees and abundant honey in the carcass. He ate some of the honey and gave it to his parents as well. He proposed a riddle to the Philistines about the honey in the carcass of the lion. They threatened the woman Samson had desired as a wife and she nagged him until he divulged the riddle to her. At once she told the Philistines and Samson had to pay off the "bet" which was for thirty sheets and thirty changes of garments (14:12). He was angry and accused them: "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle" (14:18). The Spirit of the Lord again came upon Samson and he slew thirty Philistines and took their apparel to pay his debt. He angrily left the feast and went home to his parents. When he returned to claim his "bride" he found that she had been given to another man. Then he caught 300 foxes (no small feat) and tied a fiery torch between the tails of every two and sent them out to the fields of the Philistines and so burned all their increase. The Philistines then killed the woman who might have been Samson's wife with her father. Still the anger of Samson was not pacified and he smote the Philistines "hip and thigh with a great slaughter" (15:8). When he fled to Judah, the Philistines followed him there. The men of Judah did not back Samson up, but they remonstrated with him for bringing the wrath of the ruling Philistines upon them. Three thousand men of Judah surrounded Samson and proposed to bind him and deliver him to the Philistines to appease them. Samson agreed to allow them to do this providing they swore not to kill him themselves. To this the men of Judah agreed and accordingly bound Samson with new ropes and delivered him to the Philistines. When the Philistines saw their antagonist bound and apparently helpless before them they gave a shout. But once again the Spirit of the Lord came mightily on Samson. He burst the ropes as if they were nothing and finding a fresh jaw-bone of a donkey,

he used it to slay the Philistines. One thousand fell that day, and so Samson was recognized as a judge of Israel. After this slaughter Samson was faint from thirst and God miraculously provided him with water (15:19). When once again the Philistines surrounded Samson, this time in the Philistine city of Gaza, he miraculously escaped from them. They laid wait for him at the gate of the city. When it was locked for the night they retired to wait for morning but Samson rose at midnight and with God's help, despite his unholy actions he carried the gates of the city almost forty miles to Hebron.

Thank God that we may be strengthened inwardly to overcome the wicked one and to do exploits for our Lord by the Holy Spirit which is promised to every one that asketh.

III The Fleshly Lusts War Against the Soul: Despite the remarkable physical strength Samson possessed when the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, he also was beset by two disastrous weaknesses. He was the easy victim of the carnal lusts of his flesh. He also exhibited a colossal stupidity in repeating his mistakes.

Samson insisted on marrying a daughter of the Philistines. This was forbidden for the Israelites and Samson's parents protested. The Lord allowed the plans to proceed for the wedding, but never permitted the marriage to be consummated. This woman nagged Samson for the answer to his riddle and then betrayed him by telling the secret to the Philistines. Apparently the Lord only allowed this relationship to develop in order to give Samson an occasion for vengeance against the Philistines. On another occasion, Samson yielded to the solicitations of a harlot in Gaza and then was trapped temporarily by the Philistines. Yet Samson learned nothing from these two experiences, but once again fell into lustful love with Delilah of the valley of Sorek, another Philistine "beauty". This woman betrayed Samson's trust three times and with unbelievable stupidity he revealed the Nazarite vows as the source of his strength. She treacherously, for eleven hundred pieces of silver, cut his hair and betrayed him to the Philistines. Poor Samson woke from his stupid sleep and shook himself and tried to pretend it would be as before. Sadly, his own prediction came to pass: he became "weak and like any other man" (ch.16:17). Now he fell into the clutches of the enemy. They put out his eyes and made him do the work of an ox: grinding grain in his prison home. Are there not even now many who once experienced the anointing of the Spirit of God grinding at Satan's mill. One

moment of weakness, a brief yielding to the lusts of the flesh and then a lifetime of grinding at the mill in Satan's prison house. Oh, let us be watchful. Yield not to temptation! Deal with God. Where you are weak, His Spirit can make you strong.

Fortunately, there was opportunity for repentance. Grinding and repenting daily, Samson pled with God to be avenged for his eyes. The opportunity came when he was brought to the great palace-temple of Dagon, god of the Philistines, to be mocked. There he cried for strength to God. His hair had grown long once again. Grasping the pillars on which the temple stood, he bowed himself with all his might and pulled down the house. He slew more Philistines in his death than he had in his life, for he perished with his victims in his last amazing feat of strength.

He is included amongst the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11. Yet we cannot but wonder what might have been had he fled and conquered those youthful lusts which war against the soul (I Peter 2:11). Israel never joined Samson in the war against the Philistines. He fought mightily alone. His judgeship seems to have been cut short. The Philistines continued into the days of Samuel and Saul and until David. Even so we, if careless to subdue every enemy, may fall far short of the victories God intended for us. Let us keep our vessels holy unto the Lord that He may endue us with power from on high and enable us to win lasting victories for His kingdom.

NOTES:

NO KING IN ISRAEL

Read: Judges 17 - 21

Memory Work: The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. Psalm 46:6

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The Lord has given us His law to teach us how to please Him.*
2. *We must submit to the ordinances of the Lord if we would be His true disciples.*
3. *The guidance of the Holy Spirit can never be contrary to the teaching of the Word of God.*
4. *We must worship the Lord according to His directions. The Bible clearly shows us that way.*

I Perverted Worship: The last five chapters of the book of Judges record events that took place in the early days of the judges. These chapters describe the results of ungoverned living. Four times the phrase is repeated, "There was no king in Israel," and twice it is added "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (see 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Two illustrations are given to show the result of forsaking the law of God and doing whatever seems right to yourself. The first story illustrates the deterioration of worship. The second reveals how quickly morals are perverted without the restraining influence of the law of God.

The tribes should have gathered together at the tabernacle regularly three times in the year. They should have taught their children the law of the Lord. They should have brought their tithes and offerings to the priests and Levites. They neglected these duties and as a result lost the light of how to live to please God.

Micah was an Ephraimite. He stole some money from his mother. She pronounced a curse when it was stolen and Micah confessed that he had done it. Then she blessed him and told him that the money was "dedicated to the Lord." Her purpose was

to purchase graven images with this dedicated money. Of course, if she had learned the ten commandments she would have known that this was strictly prohibited by the second commandment. Micah, her son, had a "house of gods," as well as priestly paraphernalia (17:5). He made one of his own young sons a priest. This was another violation of the law.

The Levites must have been neglected by Israel, for we find them traveling about and looking for employment. Jonathan, a Levite (18:30), and possibly a direct descendant of Moses through Gershom, looking for a place to earn a living, came to the home of Micah in his journey. Micah offered him a small sum of 10 shekels a year and a new suit and his room and board (17:10) if he would stay and be his private priest. So this miserable Levite served Micah by officiating in his house of idols, while Micah deluded himself into thinking he was blessed to have his very own personal Levite priest.

The tribe of Dan was looking for more territory at this time and five spies from that tribe stopped by chance at the home of Micah. There they met the rebel priest and asked counsel of God through him. They were told to go in peace for the Lord was with them. The Lord did prosper their errand and soon they returned to the house of Micah with six hundred men. They easily convinced the Levite to forsake Micah and come with them. It would be better to serve six hundred than one man. So the Danites took the graven image and all the priestly instruments as well as the Levite vagabond priest. Micah chased them and protested loudly but realized they outnumbered him and so returned home. The Danites, reinforced by their new priest, attacked the city of Laish and overcame it (18:27). They changed the name of the city to Dan, naming it after the father of their tribe. This is undoubtedly the same city mentioned in Joshua 19:47, only there the name of the city was Leshem. There they set up the graven image of Micah and made this reprobate Levite, Jonathan, their priest. Jonathan and his descendants were priests to the tribe of Dan until the captivity (18:30). All this went on while the tabernacle of the Lord was at Shiloh, neglected if not forsaken.

11 Perverted Morals: Another Levite from Ephraim took a concubine (secondary and inferior wife) from the town of Bethlehem. This woman was unfaithful to her Levite husband and ran away from him and back to her father. The Levite pursued her. He spoke kindly to her and with a kind and forgiving spirit accepted her back. The woman took the Levite to her father's house

and the father rejoiced to meet the Levite. They feasted together. Several times this was repeated until finally the Levite resolutely determined to leave despite the late hour. The Levite, his wife and their servant did not get very far before sunset. Not wishing to spend the night in the heathen stronghold of Jebus (later called Jerusalem) they pressed on to Gibeah. There they were not accepted into any lodging. Just when it seemed that they would be compelled to spend the night in the street an old man came from his work in the field. Like the Levite, the old man was from the tribe of Ephraim, but the people of Gibeah were of the tribe of Benjamin. The old man provided lodging for the Levite and his wife and servant. The evil men of that town were soon at the door of the old man's house. When their perverse homosexual desires were not satisfied these wicked men of Gibeah took the concubine of the Levite and vented their lust on this unfortunate woman. They finally let her go at dawn, and she returned to the house but fell down dead at the door of the house. The distraught Levite took her body and cut it into twelve pieces. He sent one piece to each of the tribes and caused an uproar throughout all of Israel. The elders gathered together at Mizpeh and heard the story of the Levite. The elders were outraged at the lewdness of the men of Gibeah and determined to destroy them.

III Perverted Judgment: An army was conscripted, selecting one of every ten men of proper age. Four hundred thousand men were armed for the judgment of Benjamin. The men of Israel demanded that the wicked perpetrators of the lewd crime be delivered for execution, but the tribe of Benjamin gave protection to these brutes and precipitated the disastrous conflict which followed. Benjamin mustered twenty-six thousand men beside an elite corps of seven hundred left-handed marksmen. The tribe of Benjamin had also produced the left-handed Ehud, second judge of Israel (ch.3:15). At the instruction of the Lord the soldiers of Judah attacked the city of Gibeah first. As in all civil wars, both sides lost. Benjamin's counter attacks surprised Israel and 22,000 Israelites perished. In the second battle 18,000 more perished at the hand of the fierce warriors of Benjamin. Israel employed the strategy used at Ai (see Joshua 8) to finally defeat Benjamin in the third battle. Twenty-five thousand Benjamites perished needlessly. So for the want of delivering up the small number of guilty men involved in the wanton abuse of the Levite's concubine, sixty-five thousand men died.

The men of Israel were carried away with their zeal to punish the guilty and nearly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin. They vowed rashly not to give their daughters to marry the men of Benjamin. The rest of the narrative of Judges, describes their second thoughts regarding the extinction of Benjamin and their schemes to get around the vow they had made and get wives for the men of Benjamin. The sad story ends with the oft repeated indictment, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25). This sad state of affairs came about because of the insistence of every individual to do that which was right in his own eyes. The authority of the law was rejected. Israel went through this period when the tribes insisted on their "state's rights." This culminated in a state of anarchy, when all central governing, by the Lord and His word, or by national leaders was rejected in favor of individual rights.

William Lyon Phelps once declared with great perception that democracy could not succeed without the foundation of the fear of God. Individual freedom also becomes the greatest bondage of all when it is without responsibility to our Creator and Redeemer.

IV Our Savior and King: We have the blessed opportunity to acknowledge Jesus Christ as our king. The Jews rejected Him. "We will not have this man to reign over us," they cried. Let us declare the opposite: "We willingly choose to have Christ rule and reign over us and all that concerns us." The Word of God is our guide. We choose to accept its precepts as our guide for life. The commandments of Jesus are our delight. We choose to accept the governing of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The choice is ours to submit to those whom the Lord has set over us to be our guides. Our worship must be in Spirit and in truth. We can come to God only on His terms. There is but one Mediator and that is Christ. We cannot, like Micah, worship any way we please. God's way is not only the best way; it is the only way. We are surrounded today by outrageous moral decay. The Word of God clearly sets guidelines for our morals. Let us accept the Word as the governing force in our lives and we will spare ourselves untold misery in this life and remorse and eternal loss in the life to come. We gladly recognize the Lord Jesus as our King and desire Him to govern us in all things; and we willingly choose to do that which is right in the sight of God!

RUTH'S CHOICE

Read: Ruth 1-4; read chapter 1 several times

Memory Work: The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Psalm 46:7

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Even when God's people fail, the plan of God goes forward.*
2. *Our response to the proclamation of the Gospel is the point on which our destiny hinges; both in this life, and in that to come.*
3. *Total commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ will allow Him to make our lives worthwhile and fruitful.*

I The Connecting Link: As long as Israel had strong leaders who exercised authority over them they prospered in some measure. Moses was like a king over Israel (Deut.33:5). In the promised land, Joshua exercised the same kingly authority. The people feared (or respected) Joshua as they feared Moses, all the days of his life (Joshua 4:14). But in the days of the Judges, the people threw off all governing authority and restraining influence. The result was that everyone did as they pleased. The decay of authority gave opportunity to the depraved human nature to fall into increasing moral corruption as well as apostasy. They departed from the God-centered life ordained for Israel. The terrible stories at the end of the book of Judges illustrate what inevitably happens when people are left to do whatever is right in their own eyes. Before entering the promised land, the Lord had specifically warned Israel, that when they entered the land their worship was to follow the schedule and form set forth to them by Moses exactly. "Ye shall not do...every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes" (Deut.12:8). Yet that is precisely what Israel fell into in the days of the Judges. This condition is attributed to the fact that there was no king (authority) in Israel.

The seventh book of the Bible (Judges) concludes a distinct

era in the plan of God. The eighth book (Ruth) opens a new era in God's dealings with His people. The new era was brought in by the coronation of the "man after God's own heart," David, to reign over God's people. The 450 years of the Judges ended with Samuel who anointed David before he died. An interesting comparison may be made from the last verse of Judges: "There was no king in Israel;" and the last verse of Ruth: "And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David." In the dark days of Israel's apostacy, when they worshipped the idols of the heathen around them, and forsook the Lord who gave them the land, and plunged themselves into vile lusts; God began to work to bring about a new order. While there was no king in Israel God was preparing His king for His holy hill.

Another very interesting parallel exists between the two chief instruments of God's new beginning with David and the more important new beginning with the son of David: the Lord Jesus Christ. Hannah, a barren wife prayed and bore Samuel who prepared the way for David who was the offspring of Ruth, a childless widow. Similarly, Elisabeth, the old barren wife of Zacharias, bore the miraculous child of promise, John, who prepared the way for Jesus the Savior, born of Mary, a virgin. Oh the manifold wisdom and glory of God!

II The Turning Point: Judging from the genealogy at the end of the book, the events recorded in Ruth took place sometime early in the period of 450 years of the Judges. A famine occurred, and this, no doubt, was the discipline of God on Israel for their careless ways. In the city of Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah, the man Elimelech decided to take his family away from the famine. His name literally means "God is my king," though his actions belied his name. He took his family into the land of Moab. This land and its people were cursed by the Lord forever (see Deut.23:3). The Moabites, who originated from the vile incest of Lot and his daughter, had also seduced Israel into immorality by the wicked advice of Balaam. The Lord had pronounced His curse upon them. Yet Elimelech chose to take his family to their land. Far from escaping the discipline of God, Elimelech brought the judgment of God upon himself and his family. Naomi, his wife, and two sons Mahlon and Chilion had accompanied him. In all they spent ten years in that cursed land. The two sons matured and predictably married girls of Moab. When Christians choose to enjoy fellowship with the ungodly unbelievers, the same thing happens: the children

marry the children of unbelievers. But Elimelech died there in the land of Moab. And not long after, he was followed to the grave by his two sons. Their names are significant, Mahlon means "wasting" and Chilion "consumption". Both young men died without offspring, and now Naomi, whose name means "pleasant" was also childless. The family name and its inheritance seemed destined for oblivion.

At this depressing time Naomi heard some news from Israel. She heard that "God had visited his people in giving them bread" (1:6). This was the turning point for Naomi and Ruth and the family name and the inheritance of Elimelech. Naomi was stirred up to return to her home in Bethlehem. She believed the news which she had heard and determined to return to her home. This is a beautiful type of the good news of the Gospel. Naomi heard that the famine was over, Israel had bread again. The Gospel news proclaims that God has visited humanity in sending the Bread of Life in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Everything depends on our response to this good news.

Naomi proved her faith by setting out at once for Israel and Bethlehem. Ruth and Orpah, the two widowed daughter-in-laws, both started to accompany her. They both loved her and were willing to leave their homeland to go with their mother-in-law. This indicates that she had won their respect and love. But Naomi suggested to them that they each should return to their mother's home, find a new husband, and raise their families. Both of the young widows lifted up their voices and wept at the thought of leaving Naomi. But when Naomi pointed out the hopelessness of marriage for them in Judah, Orpah decided to take Naomi's advice and return home. She kissed her mother-in-law and wept and returned.

III Ruth's Choice: Naomi urged Ruth to do the same. To her argument for remarriage and the hope of a family Naomi added the force of Orpah's example. Yet Ruth overcame the natural desire for home and family and chose to commit herself to accompanying her mother-in-law. She saw in Naomi such qualities that inspired love and devotion. Oh, that every Christian would inspire such loyalty and commitment. Ruth's response is one of the most sublime passages in all of scripture, or in all of literature, for that matter. "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God.

Where thou diest I will die and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (ch.1:16-17). Great issues hung on that choice which Ruth made here; not only for herself and her own happiness, but also for the people of Israel and the whole Kingdom of God. Her humility is noteworthy. It was because Ruth took this lowly place to be obedient to all her mother-in-law told her, that the grace of God reached this twice cursed Moabite and lifted her from the dunghill to sit in heavenly places with the great saints of the kingdom of God.

Her total commitment should serve as an example of our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. She vowed to go wherever Naomi went. We must renounce the right to choose our own way and enter at the strait gate to walk the narrow way. Let Him choose the pathway for you. Ruth committed herself to lodge with Naomi. Ought we not to choose to abide in Christ and dwell in His Presence. Naomi must have been easy to live with, but where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there. The young widow also renounced her own people and loved ones and cast her lot with the people of Israel because they were Naomi's people. We, too, must renounce all fellowship with the world. We are to be a separated people. The former friends and associates of the world have to go in favor of the acceptance of all who are Christ's from the least to the greatest. She was even willing to give up her old gods and religion. This is among the hardest things for people to do. Religion has a powerful hold on the human heart. But the Gospel has nothing to do with religion. Jesus did not come to introduce a new and superior religion, but to save sinners and to give a new birth to those who repent and believe.

Ruth's commitment was for life. It was no trial period commitment. Can we do less than irrevocably commit our lives to the One who gave His life for us? Ruth even went beyond death in her commitment. She even purposed to be buried with Naomi. We can take it even one step further for we fully expect to be quickened together with Christ as well (see Eph.2:5).

It would be wise for all of us to go over the six steps of Ruth's consecration and make each of them our own. Our Lord is far more worthy of loyalty than Naomi could ever have been. The seventh point regarding resurrection was not understood by Ruth at that time, but for us it makes the rest of the commitment to Christ all the more glorious. He is mine and I am His forever! Praise His wonderful Name!

When the two widows arrived in Bethlehem all the town was stirred. Naomi asked them to call her, not Naomi anymore, which meant pleasant, but Mara, which meant bitter, "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty" (ch.1:20-21).

Their arrival in Bethlehem coincided with the barley harvest. This was significant, for this feast day, the feast of the first fruits, was the day on which the Lord rose from the dead and became the first fruits of those that slept. So there rose from the corrupt old order of the Judges a new ray of hope. From two widows without hope for children, God wrought marvelously to bring about the reign of a man after His own heart, who did all His will and ultimately the birth of Him whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

NOTES:

RUTH GLEANS IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ

Read: Ruth 1-4, read chapter 2 several times
Leviticus 19:9,10; Deuteronomy 24:19

Memory Work: Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth. Psalm 46:8

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *For the followers of Jesus, all circumstances are for our good. Nothing is left to chance.*
2. *Those who respond to the invitation to come to Jesus, are welcomed into the heavenly family with all its provisions and responsibilities.*
3. *The Lord expects His followers to forsake the fellowship of the world, and to give their faithful service to Him and His cause.*
4. *To those who accept the discipline of the Lord, He gives rewards above and beyond all we could ask or think.*

I The "Hap" of Ruth: Ruth the Moabitess had come to Israel and to Bethlehem in response to the testimony of her mother-in-law. Her experiences, as recorded in this short and beautiful story, correspond with the spiritual development of every believer. Desperate circumstances had motivated Ruth to follow Naomi. Even so, for many believers, great afflictions, and desperate circumstances have driven them to the Lord. His invitation is full of hope: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt.11:28-30). The perfect truth of this great Gospel promise is illustrated beautifully in the history of Ruth. Surely, Naomi and Ruth were heavy laden with sorrow and affliction. Both were widows. They had no visible means of support. But the turning point in their lives came when they responded to the message that God had visited His people in giving them

bread. When they came to Bethlehem all the city was moved (to pity them), and Naomi expressed, with sorrow, that the Almighty had afflicted her.

Are there not many among us who are driven to the Lord by afflictions and trials. We, too, often complain that the Lord has dealt bitterly with us. Yet these very trials which we complain of, bring us to the Lord. The trials drove Naomi to return to Bethlehem where the Lord had visited his people; and the trials cause us to draw near to the Lord who desires only the best for us.

When Ruth cast in her lot with Naomi, God began to work for her. Boaz, we are told, was a kinsman of the family of Elimelech. He was a mighty man of wealth and he was a man of God. His name means "in him is strength." Ruth, of course, knew nothing of how God would work for her. She knew nothing of the Hebrew law of redemption. When we come to Jesus, we too, cannot possibly know all that the Lord has in His heart for us. It is enough for us to know and recognize that His thoughts and ways are far above anything we might think of, and hope for, of ourselves.

Provisions had been made by the Lord in His law for the indigent among the people. It was the form of welfare aid for those in unfortunate circumstances. They were permitted to follow the harvesters in the fields and gather, for their own use, all that fell to the ground, and whatever the reapers missed. The farm owners were admonished to leave some of the fruit of the field, in the corners, and in the extremities of their fields, for this purpose (see Lev.19:9-10; Deut.24:19). Ruth and Naomi had arrived at Bethlehem just in time for the earliest harvest: the barley harvest. Ruth volunteered to go and glean in the fields so that she and Naomi would have sustenance. It is noteworthy that Ruth, who of course, was an adult, sought permission and approval of her proposed action from her mother-in-law. The approval was given and Ruth set out. The fields of grain were not fenced, but marked obscurely by stone markers on the edges. The fields of many land owners were joined side by side and end to end without visible boundaries. On that morning Ruth simply set out to the fields of grain and without thought began to glean according to the custom. By "chance" she gleaned in the field of Boaz, the kinsman of Elimelech. The quaint marginal reading in the King James version of the scripture reads: "her hap happened to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz" (ch.2:3 marg.). What seemed to be mere chance was the gracious design of the

Lord. How many testimonies we could give, how things which seemed to happen by chance, turned out to be great providences of the Lord. Some chance acquaintance which brought us the testimony of the Gospel. Some accidental finding of a book which brought us great blessing. Chance attendance at some gathering where we heard the Gospel message. God is still on the throne and He will work wonders on our behalf if we will commit our lives unto Him. Let us trust Him with all of our heart and lean not on our own reasoning and scheming. If we acknowledge Him in all our ways He will direct our paths as He did Ruth's that fateful morning.

II The Lord's Family: Before the day ended, Boaz came from town to the field. His faith and character are recognized at once. It was a time when Israel was apostate. Everyone was doing that which was right in his own eyes. Yet this man lived in the fear of God. He greeted his reapers with the words "the Lord be with you." They responded in kind, "the Lord bless thee." Here was one household which had not forsaken the Lord. Boaz quickly noticed the stranger gleaning amongst the others. He inquired of the foreman of the reapers who this girl was. The overseer had anticipated his inquiry and was well prepared to give full answer to the question. He not only told Boaz who she was but also reported how industriously she had toiled since early morning (vs.7).

Boaz went at once to Ruth and spoke directly to her. He told her she should not glean in any other field and he called her "my daughter". His advice to her certainly had in it the promise that she would be well provided for by Boaz and his reapers. But of even more interest is the manner in which he addressed her. He called her "daughter". She became "one of the family" immediately. He told her to stay with his maidens and glean after them. He promised her protection and provision. In effect he told her to make herself at home. When thirsty she was to help herself to the water drawn by the young men for the reapers. What an inspiring picture this is of the "strangers" who come to the Lord! They are immediately received as sons and daughters and invited to drink freely from the water of life. The Lord offers His protection and provision and speaks friendly (to the heart) to each one.

Ruth fell on her face before Boaz, astonished at his kindness to her. He revealed that he was aware of the choice she had made to leave her own land and people and come with her mother-in-law to Bethlehem where she knew no one. When Ruth

again expressed her appreciation of his kind words, Boaz went even further and invited her to join him at the meal time. She did, and sat with the reapers. Boaz reached her some parched corn and when she went out to glean again he instructed the young men to let her glean unhindered and to let some grain fall on purpose for her. So she was abundantly provided for and on that day great things were begun, above and beyond all that Ruth or Naomi could ask or think. Ruth, the stranger and Moabitess, had found her way into fellowship with Boaz, a mighty man of wealth and man of God, and had, in effect, come into his household. She had gleaned enough on that day to last Naomi and herself for five days and she had been invited to stay with the reapers of Boaz for the entire harvest.

III Separation: Ruth had already left her own country and people, but now Boaz asked her to give up the thought of occupation or fellowship any where else. The Lord Jesus asks no less of us. Our "family" becomes the people of God in our local assembly. There we are to find our fellowship and our opportunities for service. The Lord promises us His protection and provision, but we are instructed to "Go not to glean in another field." We are invited to join the family of God. Let us understand the responsibility we have when we come to trust under the wings of our Lord. In every well ordered house there are assigned tasks and chores and responsibilities. In the congregation of the Lord, too, each of us who are in that blessed relationship must do our part to further the kingdom of God. No other cause may excuse us from our primary responsibility to work for Jesus. Find your place. Be faithful there. The whole body suffers when one member does not function properly. Civic affairs, PTA functions, politics and charitable volunteer work all must take second place to our responsibility to the Lord. These causes which are endeavoring to make the world a better place to live in must ultimately fail, for this world is doomed. Our social activities also are to be with the people of God. We are not to join the maidens in any other field or follow the young men which reap in any other field. If we follow this advice we will be provided for abundantly.

IV Near of Kin: When Ruth told Naomi that she had gleaned in the field of Boaz, the mother-in-law at once recognized God's hand. She forgot how bitterly God had dealt with her and saw that He had not ceased to show kindness to her and to the dead (her husband and sons). Ruth had no idea at this point,

what it meant when Naomi told her that Boaz was "near of kin" to them, and "one of our next kinsmen". Neither do we always recognize all that God intends by our daily experiences and contacts. God does not work aimlessly. He has a plan. You are important to Him. Let us hear His call and forsake the world and all outside entanglements. If we let Him have His way, He will do far more, for, and through us, than we could ever dream.

NOTES:

THE PART OF THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER

Read: Ruth 1-4; especially chapter 3
 Leviticus 25:23-28 Leviticus 25:47-49
 Jeremiah 32:6-8 Psalm 49:6-9
 Deuteronomy 25:5-10 Hebrews 2:14-15
 Genesis 38:7-11

Memory Work: He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Psalm 46:9

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. The Kinsman-Redeemer of the law is a beautiful type of Jesus Christ who became our kinsman by taking the form of man, that He might redeem us unto God by His own blood.

2. The entire human race is in bondage to the devil, and has lost the priceless possession of dominion, and can only be delivered from eternal death by the Kinsman-Redeemer.

I Shall I Not Seek Rest For Thee? When Naomi learned that Ruth had gleaned in the field of Boaz, and that this mighty man of wealth had dealt kindly with her, faith sprang up in her heart. She realized at once that the Lord had not "left off his kindness to the living and to the dead" (ch.2:20). Naomi knew the law of Israel regarding redemption. This caused hope to arise in her heart first for her daughter-in-law, Ruth, and ultimately for herself and the estate of her late husband. Ruth had no knowledge of the law concerning redemption, but she fully trusted the judgment of her mother-in-law.

Now Naomi began to set in motion actions which could lead to: redemption of her own dead husband's property; the marriage of Ruth; and the raising up of the family name now at the point of extinction. "Shall I not seek rest for thee that it may be well with thee," she asked? (ch.3:1). By this she meant that Ruth should find provision, protection and security in being married to one who had the right to redeem her, and her husband's property. In order that the families of Israel

should not be blotted out, God had made provision in the law for the redemption of any Israelite who for any reason was sold into slavery. Gracious provision was also made that the family property, which was their rightful inheritance in the promised land, should be redeemed by a near relative or returned to the original owner at the year of Jubilee. Finally, the Lord also provided that should the head of the family die leaving no offspring, that a brother or near kinsman should marry the widow and give the name and inheritance of the dead to the first son of that union. This was what was in Naomi's mind when she began to "seek rest" for her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

Before Ruth chose to cleave to her mother-in-law, Naomi had advised both Ruth and Orpah to return to their mothers' house, that they might subsequently find rest in the home of a new husband (ch.1:8-9). Orpah took the advice and disappeared into obscurity, while Ruth chose to commit herself to her mother-in-law and her God. Accordingly now, Naomi, inspired to faith by the "chance happenings," actively sought for this rest for her beloved Ruth.

To understand properly the actions of Ruth and the instructions of Naomi we must study the law which covered this situation. Ruth did not act in an immodest and unclean manner. There need be no apology for her actions on this occasion. Naomi instructed her to go to the floor where the barley was being processed and note the place where Boaz would lie down to sleep. Then Ruth was instructed to go and lie at his feet and await his instructions. Naomi told Ruth that Boaz was a near kinsman and she in turn was to tell Boaz this fact. Ruth did exactly as she was told. She lay down at the feet of Boaz and waited for him to discover her. When he turned over in the night Boaz discovered the woman at his feet. He asked who she was and Ruth told him and asked him to do the part of the near kinsman. Naomi knew the law perfectly and instructed Ruth well. Boaz also knew the law, but he also knew that there was another kinsman closer than he, and so he told Ruth that he could not legally take the part of kinsman-redeemer unless this nearer kinsman gave up his right of redemption. He further instructed Ruth to sleep until morning and then leave without being discovered. He did not reproach her for her actions but assured her that, "all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman" (ch.3:11). He gave her six measures of barley and a promise to attend to this matter of redemption at once. Ruth reported the events of the night to

Naomi in the early dawn. Now Naomi was full of confidence. "Sit still, my daughter," she assured Ruth, "until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day" (ch.3:18).

II The Law of the Kinsman-Redeemer: This provision of God had three distinct parts. First, there was the redemption of property (Lev.25:23-25). The inheritance of each family of Israel was sacred to them and highly prized. It was on this basis that Naboth refused to give up his family inheritance to wicked Ahab. Another illustration of the redemption of the land is recorded in Jeremiah. Hanameel, the son of Jeremiah's uncle Shalum requested that the prophet redeem his field at Anathoth. The right of redemption belonged to Jeremiah and at the word of the Lord he did indeed redeem the field to prove his own confidence in the prophecy that despite the impending captivity, Israel would be restored and return to their inheritance in the days to come (Jer.32:6-12).

The second part of the law of redemption was concerned with redeeming those who, through debt and poverty, had been sold, or had sold themselves into the bondage of slavery (Lev.25:47-49). After anyone had become a slave, any of his brothers or an uncle or someone nigh of kin unto him could redeem him out of the bondage of slavery by paying the price demanded by the master. Even further, God in His great mercy, provided that both property, and those in slavery, should be automatically restored to their original condition, at the year of Jubilee.

The third area covered by the law of redemption made provision for the continuation of a family where the man died without an heir. This is clearly a type of the resurrection. The kinsman-redeemer was required by this statute to marry the widow of his deceased kinsman and give the name and inheritance of his dead relative to the first son born to this union. The law of God was in effect before Moses gave the people of Israel the written law. A son of Judah died leaving no heir and Onan his brother refused to do the part of the kinsman. So displeased was the Lord with his action (see Gen.38:7-11) that He slew Onan. It was this feature of the gracious law of God that stimulated Naomi to instruct Ruth to approach Boaz and claim the provision of God that he perform the part of the kinsman-redeemer.

III Our Kinsman-Redeemer: The entire human race was sold into

the slavery of Satan when Adam and Eve chose to follow the evil one's suggestion in direct disobedience to God. They were created to have dominion over creation. This great privilege was lost in the fall. The earth which had been wonderfully made by the Lord, became cursed. So man himself and his possession, the earth, fell into the dominion of the enemy of our souls. Rebelling from the will of God, man chose to do his own will. He became subservient to the self-life. This fleshly union produces only fruit unto death.

Immediately, upon the fall of man, God began the plan of redemption. This, in a word, is the one great theme of the Bible. The kinsman-redeemer of the Old Testament had to be near of kin to the one redeemed. Our spiritual Redeemer also had to become near of kin to us. Here we have the basic reason for the incarnation. Jesus took the form of man that He might become the near kinsman with the right to redeem us from bondage (see Heb.2:14-15). The kinsman-redeemer of the law, had to pay the price of redemption, whether for the land or for the bondsman. There could be no redemption without payment in full of the price involved. Our spiritual Redeemer must also of necessity pay the full price of our redemption. Nothing less than the life and blood of the spotless son of God was acceptable for this redemption. Yet for the joy of the prospect of such a redeemed bride for the Lamb, God gave all that He had and delivered the Lord Jesus up for us all. Not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with His own precious blood, our Lord has redeemed us from the slavery to the world, the flesh and the devil. He that sins is the slave of sin, and our Lord and redeemer alone can deliver us from this bondage. Man would rather redeem himself. His pride prevents him from accepting the free and full atoning work of the Redeemer. But there is no way for anyone to redeem himself or his brother (see Ps. 49:6-9).

Only when man repents of choosing self, and consecrates himself to the Lord, can God raise up fruit for the kingdom of God. In Christ the believer is restored to liberty. As a partaker of redemption he is restored to a portion, at least, of dominion. We may as redeemed ones reign in life over the world and the flesh and the devil, and bring forth fruit unto holiness.

There is more to look forward to concerning redemption. The time for the "redemption of the purchased possession" is at hand. The full price has been paid. The old enemy still is the prince of this world, and resists abandoning his sphere of

activity. But his eviction is sure. Then even the creation will be liberated from the bondage of corruption and enjoy the manifestation of the sons of God who sing, "Thou art worthy to take the book (title deed to the earth) and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev.5:9-10). Here is the ultimate purpose of our redemption: that we might belong to God and reign with, and for Him, on the renewed and redeemed earth.

NOTES:

DISPOSING OF THE NEARER KINSMAN

Read: Ruth 1-4; especially chapter 4
 Romans 6 & 7; Ephesians 4:20-24;
 Colossians 3:8-11

Memory Work: Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. Ps.46:10

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Just as Boaz did not rest until he had completed the details whereby Ruth was redeemed, so the Lord does not stop working on behalf of those who consecrate themselves to Him, until they are joined to Christ.*

2. *The "nearer kinsman" that must be taken out of the way represents our "old nature." This hindrance to full redemption is removed by an act of faith, crucifying it with Christ.*

3. *The Lord delights to bring glory to His name by bringing about great results from impossible situations.*

I Until He Have Finished the Thing: Naomi advised Ruth to sit still and wait expectantly to see what would develop. She was sure that Boaz would lose no time in arranging the details, in one way or another, for the redeeming of Ruth, as well as the property of Elimelech. We too, may sit still in faith, when we have fully committed ourselves to our Lord and His Kingdom, and expect Him to work out every detail that will make us fit to be His bride. Like Boaz, our Lord has "finished the thing." He has paid the price and we are fully redeemed.

II The Nearer Kinsman: The Old Nature: The only thing that kept Boaz from taking Ruth as his bride and wife, was the existence of one nearer of kin to Elimelech than he. So long as this closer relation did not renounce his right to redeem the property and family name of Elimelech, Boaz could not act. But, just as Naomi had foreseen, Boaz began at once to take

action which would settle the matter. Boaz was up early and at the gate of Bethlehem looking for this "nearer kinsman". When he saw him he called him aside and asked him to sit down. Boaz took ten men for witnesses so that all would be legally done and attested. He informed the kinsman that Naomi who had so recently returned from the land of Moab, was selling a piece of land which had belonged to Elimelech. "If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it; but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know, for there is none to redeem it beside thee, and I am after thee" (ch.4:4). The relative was quite willing to redeem the field, "I will redeem it," he declared. But then Boaz advised him that if he redeemed the field he must also include Ruth the Moabitess in his redemption. He would have to take her in the bargain and raise a family by her to raise up the name of the dead. Here the nearer kinsman balked. He was willing to add a field to his own property, but he was not willing to raise up the name of the dead by marrying Ruth. He did not wish to mar his own inheritance. If he took Ruth and fathered a son to raise up the name of the dead, the field would return to the ownership of the descendants of Elimelech. So the nearer kinsman was unwilling to redeem both the field and the daughter-in-law of Naomi and Elimelech. He suggested that Boaz take his place and do the redeeming. The law demanded that the nearest kinsman who would not fulfill the part of redemption should bear disgrace. He was required to take off his shoes. The landowners wore shoes while the servants and slaves went barefoot. So this reluctant kinsman had to bear the public disgrace. Yet he would rather bear it than to mar his own inheritance.

But this was exactly what Boaz was hoping for. Now the way was clear for him to act. To all the people he declared, "Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's, and Mahlon's of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" (ch.4:9-10). The people gladly witnessed the redemption and pronounced a blessing on the union. They expressed the hope that Ruth would be as fruitful as Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob who bore the 12 patriarchs and who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. Though we are advised of only one son born to this union, that one was Obed the father of Jesse, the father of David the king, the direct ancestor of Jesus, the King of Kings.

Since Boaz is a type of Christ in this beautiful story of

redemption, and Ruth is the representative of the redeemed believers, the question arises as to who is represented by this "nearer kinsman". Logic tells us it must be one who can hinder our spiritual redemption and one who is close to us. Jesus became flesh in order to become a near kinsman with the right to redeem us. But this other must be even closer of kin. The conclusion becomes obvious that this nearer kinsman is our own old nature: the "old man" which Paul speaks of. So long as the self-life is not taken out of the way, the full redemption of our Lord cannot be effected. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him," Paul wrote to the Romans. That is how this nearer kinsman is disposed of. He must, by an act of faith, be crucified, and reckoned as dead. The habits and actions of the self-life are to be "put off" while the works of the "new man" are to be "put on" (see Eph.4:20-24; & Col.3:8-11). This is of the utmost importance.

III Fruit Unto God: We cannot be joined to our Redeemer until this nearer kinsman is taken out of the way. The carnal nature is our natural heritage from Adam who by his disobedience sold us all into the slavery of sin. We are, according to the figure in Romans 7, married to this carnal nature which is ours by the law. But God be thanked, there is deliverance. We become "dead to the law," that binds us to the carnal nature, "by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:4). Here the purpose of our redemption is set forth. We are to bear spiritual fruit by our union with the Redeemer.

God delights to bring about results from hopeless situations. Sarah and Abraham were as good as dead as far as raising a family was concerned. Yet Isaac was supernaturally born and from Jacob, his son, sprang the 12 patriarchs. Here, too, in our present study, Elimelech died and Naomi lost her only two sons. Their name and inheritance seemed doomed. Yet, by the choice of Ruth, the Moabitess, who committed herself to Naomi and the God of Israel, the Lord worked miraculously so that not only was the name of the dead raised up, but the fruit of that wonderful work of God was David the King in the third generation.

The New Testament begins also with the birth of one child to a barren old wife of a priest and the birth of another to a virgin. So God glorifies His own name by working wonderfully when things seem impossible. The name Ruth means "satisfied".

She surely found satisfaction in the union with Boaz (in him is strength). It seemed that she gave up all hope of marriage and motherhood when she chose to remain with Naomi. But God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts far above our thoughts. Ruth, the twice cursed native of Moab, through the beautiful redemption provided by the Lord, found deliverance from the curse, rest and satisfaction in the house of Israel and Boaz, and the unspeakable blessing of a place in the royal lineage of Christ the Redeemer of all. The redemption of God is freely and fully offered to all today. Let us be sure that the nearer kinsman of our natural carnal life is crucified with Christ. Let us put on the deeds of the new man. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (11Cor.5:17).

The effect of our complete redemption will inevitably be that we bring forth fruit unto God. Obed was born to Ruth, and Naomi rejoiced as though the babe were her own. The babe was a restorer of life to Naomi and indeed the entire book of Ruth is full of the thought of resurrection. The result of our union with our Boaz, the Lord Jesus, will be fruit unto God. May God grant us to claim our deliverance from the "old man", and the redemption which unites us to Christ, that we may bring forth spiritual fruit for eternity.

NOTES:

SAMUEL'S BIRTH AND YOUTH

Read: I Samuel 1, 2, & 3

Memory Work: The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Psalm 46:11

What we should learn from this Lesson

- 1. The day by day trials and afflictions which drive us to prayer can turn out to be the means of great blessing to ourselves and others.*
- 2. God's reproof to Eli and the judgment pronounced upon him and his sons indicate the danger of parental permissiveness.*
- 3. The Lord is able and willing to reveal Himself to boys and girls who devote themselves to Him and listen to His Word.*

I Hannah's Prayer: After the untimely death of Samson, Eli judged Israel for forty years. He was both the High Priest and the judge. Perhaps his double position was too much for him. He sadly neglected the upbringing of his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Eli was a direct descendant of Aaron and so, of course, was of the tribe of Levi. During the time of his High Priesthood and judgeship a significant birth took place. Samuel was born to Hannah and Elkanah of the tribe of Ephraim.

The tabernacle in some form, was still standing at Shiloh. The man Elkanah went there once a year to sacrifice to the Lord. This was during the period in the history of Israel when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Not many Israelites took the time to go to Shiloh to appear before the Lord to make sacrifices and bring their tithes and offerings for the maintenance of the tabernacle and the support of the Levites. The law of God obligated every man of Israel to appear before the Lord three times in the year (Ex.23:14-17). Although Elkanah was not doing all that was required of him by the law, he was probably doing more than most Israelites. This God-fearing Ephraimite had two wives, Hannah and Peninah. Only the latter bore Elkanah children. This made her to

act haughtily toward Hannah. Despite her barrenness Elkanah loved Hannah and treated her kindly and considerately. But Hannah wanted a child, particularly a son. While with Elkanah at Shiloh, Hannah did not eat for sorrow of heart. Peninnah had become an adversary to her and continually provoked her. Elkanah comforted Hannah and got her to eat. Then Hannah went to the house of the Lord where old Eli sat upon a seat by a pillar of the building. In desperate bitterness of soul Hannah prayed to the Lord for a child. She promised to rededicate him to the Lord to be a Nazarite all his life if only God would give her a son. As Hannah prayed she moved her lips, pronouncing the words with her lips but without speaking them audibly. Eli was watching her closely and he misjudged her. "How long wilt thou be drunken?" he rebuked Hannah, "put away the wine from thee" (ISam.1:14). Not many Israelites prayed so earnestly as Hannah and so Eli concluded she must be drunk. She explained to him that she had drunk no wine nor strong drink, but was pouring out her heart to the Lord.

Eli saw his mistake at once and pronounced a benediction upon the fervent pray-er. "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition," he assured her. That was all Hannah needed. She grasped that benediction and promise with hands of faith. She was no more sad, God had heard. The High Priest had put his benediction on her prayer.

In the morning they rose up early and worshipped before the Lord and returned to their home at Ramah, in the tribe of Ephraim. Of course, Hannah bore Elkanah a son and called his name Samuel, which means "asked of God." She did not go to Shiloh with Elkanah for the next several years but she did not forget her vow to God. Samuel was dedicated to be a life-long Nazarite. As soon as he was old enough, Hannah would take him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh where he would live and serve at the pleasure of the High Priest.

Those years at home with his mother must have been filled with instruction and devotion. Hannah told her husband that as soon as the lad was weaned she would accompany him with the child to Shiloh and there dedicate him to live before the Lord all the days of his life. What mixed emotions must have welled up in Hannah's heart as she finally took young Samuel to the house of the Lord.

II Samuel at the House of Eli: Hannah had a heart full of praise and thanks to God for his answer to her prayer. She left him more with the Lord than with Eli. How easily might

the young Samuel have been led astray in the house of Eli. The sons of Eli led rotten lives. They stole from the offerings which the people brought to the Lord that which did not belong to them. They took advantage of the women who came to worship, forcing them to commit immoral acts. Their vile conduct caused the people of Israel to abhor the worship of Jehovah. Despite this less than ideal situation, Hannah left the young child and lifted up her prayer and praise to God for His faithfulness. The song of Hannah is one of the most sublime peans of praise in the sacred writ (ch.2:1-10). Her song of praise ended with the first mention in the sacred writings of the anointed (Messiah). The man of God who warned Eli of the judgment to come because of the wickedness of his sons, also mentioned that the faithful priest whom God was raising up, would walk before the anointed (Messiah) of God forever. With the consecration of Samuel as the faithful servant of Jehovah a new step in God's progressive revelation took place. Samuel was the last of the judges, but the first of the prophets.

When Elkanah and Hannah left Samuel with Eli, the old priest blessed them and intoned, "The Lord give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord" (ch.2:20). According to the priest's word, Hannah did bear more children, three sons and two daughters. You cannot outgive God. The young lad ministered to the Lord dressed in a miniature priestly outfit. Each year Hannah brought Samuel a little coat which she made for him. No doubt, Hannah prayed much for her boy as she sewed that coat a little larger each year.

III God Calls Young Samuel: Samuel's duties included opening the doors of the house of the Lord, in the morning. No doubt, many of the simple chores, such as lighting the lamps in the house of the Lord were performed by Samuel. The glorious manifestation of the presence of God had long before disappeared. The High Priest did not have ears to hear the word of the Lord. God had to send a messenger to Eli to warn him of judgment to come on his sons and himself because of their sin and his lack of discipline. There was no open vision. The priests' eyes were blinded by materialism and lust. "Where there is no vision the people perish" (Prov.29:18). How different were these days from the days of Moses. How often the words are recorded, "And the Lord spake unto Moses." To Eli, the Lord could not speak. He had no ears to hear.

Now as Samuel went to his bed in the evening, God called him. The lad ran to Eli thinking it was he who had called.

Eli told him to return to his bed as he had not called. Again God called and again Samuel reported to Eli with the same result. The third time Eli perceived that God was calling the lad. He instructed Samuel to respond to the next call, "Speak Lord; for thy servant heareth." Samuel did exactly as Eli told him and then God did indeed speak to this young fellow. God told Samuel that He was about to judge the house of Eli. No sacrifice or offering could reverse the judgment. Because the two sons of Eli had made themselves vile and the father had not restrained them, therefore the family was to be cut off.

Samuel did not sleep much that night. At dawn he opened the gates of the house of the Lord. He naturally did not want to tell Eli what the Lord had revealed to him, but the old priest insisted and Samuel faithfully told him all. Eli's response was typical, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good" (ch.3:18). In Samuel God had, at last, a vessel to whom He could speak. Samuel grew to young manhood and God was with him. None of his words fell to the ground. Whatever Samuel spoke proved to be the word of the Lord. Soon all Israel knew that God had raised up a real prophet of the Lord.

We see from this story out of the pages of the Old Testament, how anxious the Lord is to reveal Himself to His people. He is ready to call young people today and reveal Himself to them by His Spirit. There is no age limit on how old you must be before the Lord will reveal Himself. How good it is for young people to be involved in serving the Lord. When you are constantly in His house and occupied with the things of God there is more liklihood that the Lord will reveal Himself. Let every boy and girl recognize that God can use them. He knows each of us by name just as he knew Samuel by name. Every mother ought to be encouraged by the result of the prayer of Hannah. Her prayer for a son brought not only satisfaction to herself, but great victory to all Israel.

SAMUEL: LAST JUDGE AND FIRST PROPHET

Read: I Samuel 4, 5, 6 & 7

Memory Work: Review Psalm 46:1-11

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *To lose the Presence of the Lord is to lose the glory of the Kingdom.*
2. *The judgment of God is just as certain as the blessed promises of the Gospel.*
3. *We can only approach the Lord and have fellowship with Him in the way He has ordained. We dare not profane His name or His holiness.*
4. *The work of God on our behalf is more effective than the greatest efforts we may expend naturally.*

I Established a Prophet of the Lord: As Samuel matured at Shiloh in the house of Eli it became evident that God was with him. It seems that some edifice more substantial in nature had replaced the wilderness tabernacle. When Hannah prayed for a son, the sanctuary is described as a temple (see ch.1:9). Eli sat upon a seat by a post of the building. But so backslidden and wicked were the sons of Eli who were serving as priests, that God's Presence was not manifested at all any more. They did not see any manifestation of His Presence like the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which guided the children of Israel through the wilderness. They did not hear the voice of the Lord as Moses and Joshua had. Their worship had become an empty form. The word of the Lord was rare and there was no open vision.

It was to Samuel that God revealed Himself. After that first remarkable manifestation where God called young Samuel in the night and told him of the judgment to come on the house of Eli, Samuel must have learned to commune with God on a regular basis. Whenever God spoke to Samuel and he ministered the word to the people, his words came to pass. Not a word that Samuel spoke turned out to be wrong. "The Lord was with

him and did let none of his words fall to the ground." Soon all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that the Lord was with Samuel and that he was a true prophet of the Lord. Now the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. Probably, the glory of the Lord was manifested in a pillar of cloud in the tabernacle again. To Samuel the Lord manifested Himself by the Word of the Lord. What a difference one godly young man made! The whole nation was blessed. Your godliness, too, can bring great blessing to your loved ones and to many others. Despite the prevalent materialism and immorality around us let us purpose to live holy lives to please the Lord.

In this Gospel age, when the Holy Spirit is given to us, we have the glorious privilege to have fellowship with our Lord. He is anxious to speak His Word to our hearts. We may be greatly blessed and helped by the ministry of the Word through God's servants. We receive blessed help through the scriptures, but God is ready to speak to us personally and reveal His wisdom to us individually when we take time to wait upon Him and let Him reveal Himself as He chooses. This is an unspeakably blessed provision of our Lord. Let us not forfeit this rich gift by neglect or carelessness.

II Ichabod: The Glory is Departed: God had first sent a man of God to Eli to warn him of impending judgment. Then He spoke to Samuel of the imminent and certain punishment upon the vile sons of Eli and his house. Eli protested his sons actions halfheartedly but showed no inclination toward repentance when told of the impending judgment. Now the wrath of God came just as certainly as the blessings of the promises of God.

The Philistines had not been subdued despite the judgeship of Samson. His ministry fell short of God's provision. In the days of Eli and Samuel and Saul until the time of David, these enemies plagued Israel. The people of Israel went out against the Philistines and four thousand men were lost. Then they decided to fetch the ark of the covenant from its place in Shiloh and bring it into the camp. They presumed that the presence of the ark would bring them success. When the ark arrived at the army camp all the men gave a shout. But the Lord was departed from Israel and the day of judgment had come. Hophni and Phinehas came with the ark to the battleground.

The Philistines heard the shouting and discovered the cause. They took the ark itself to be the God of Israel and called to mind the devastation of Egypt by the God of Israel some 400

years before. In today's language the Philistines psyched themselves up for the battle. "Be strong and quit yourselves like men," they encouraged one another. Indeed they did fight and win. Thirty-thousand Israelites died, including Hophni and Phinehas, and worst of all the Philistines captured the ark of the Lord.

When news of the battle reached Shiloh by messenger, the whole city was shocked and cried out in a great lamentation. Eli heard the cry and inquired of the cause. He got the news that Israel had been badly defeated and that his two sons were dead and that the ark of the Lord had been lost to the Philistines. When he heard of the ark, he fell from off the chair where he was sitting. He fell backward and his advanced age (98) and heavy weight made that fall fatal.

The news also brought about the premature birth of a child to the wife of Phinehas. She suffered in childbirth and when at the point of death she was told that she had borne a son, she did not regard the news as joyous but despondently named him Ichabod, meaning, "the glory is departed," and then expired.

Many groups and denominations have, over the years, lost the glory of God. At the beginning revival fires burned and the power and glory of God were manifested. Often prosperity and success has dampened the seeking spirit and little by little the presence and power of the Lord declined until, "Ichabod", the glory departed. Let us contend earnestly in our congregations for the glory of God. The hollow shouts of backslidden Christians cannot replace the faithful obedience and steadfast seeking of the Lord. Oh Lord, show us Thy glory! With open face may we behold the glory of the Lord and be changed into the same image by His Spirit.

III The Philistines Plagued: To the righteous the Presence of the Lord is life and blessing. To the wicked and unbelievers the manifestation of the Presence of God is devastating. The Philistines put the ark in the temple of their God, Dagon. During the night the image of Dagon fell from its pedestal prostrate before the ark. The Philistines set it upright again, but the second night not only did Dagon fall, but its head and arms broke off leaving only a stump of a torso. The Philistines moved the ark from place to place but every where they took it a plague broke out. They became terrified and purposed to return it to Israel. What Israel could not do with their army, the solitary Presence of God accomplished unaided. The fear of God fell on the Philistines. They made a new cart for the ark

and hitched it to two cows which had just borne calves. The Philistines reasoned that if these cows carried the ark to Israel, forsaking their own young nursing calves, they would be sure that the plagues had really been the judgment of God and no mere coincidence. Contrary to every natural instinct, the kine took the road to Beth-shemesh lowing as they went, showing their desire to care for their offspring. The Lords of the Philistines sent gifts as peace offerings with the ark.

At Beth-shemesh the people presumptuously looked into the ark and these foolish Israelites also were plagued. More than fifty-thousand died before they sent the ark to Kirjath-jearim. There it stayed for twenty years.

IV The Ministry of Samuel: With the destruction of the house of Eli, all Israel looked to Samuel for spiritual help. He called them to repentance (1Sam.7:3). He told them to put away the idol gods from among them. For once they obeyed and did indeed destroy the idols of Baalim and Ashteroth. Then Samuel called for a special meeting at Mizpeh where he promised to pray for the people of Israel. When they gathered, they confessed their idolatry, and Samuel judged them there. He was the last of the judges, but also the first of the prophets of the Lord. Peter told the crowd which gathered in the temple after the healing of the lame man at the gate beautiful, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after... have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3:24).

Now the Philistines thinking that Israel had assembled to organize a battle, gathered their army together against Israel. The people of God were afraid, but Samuel offered a lamb to the Lord and interceded to Him for Israel. God heard Samuel's prayer and fought against the Philistines for Israel. God "thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines and they were smitten before Israel that day" (ch.7:10). Israel chased the Philistines to Beth-car where Samuel erected a stone and named it Eben-ezer: "hitherto hath the Lord helped us" (vs.12).

The victory that day given as a result of Samuel's prayer kept the Philistines out of the territory of Israel all the days of Samuel. This victory was greater than any Saul ever won and shows again what God can do with one individual totally given to Him.

Samuel travelled like a Methodist circuit rider and judged Israel at Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh and then returned to his home at Ramah, where he built an altar to the Lord. Thus he faithfully ministered to Israel and brought deliverance and blessing to the people of God.