

In our survey of the Bible, we have come to the period of the judges. You recall that the children of Israel who through Jacob and his twelve sons had gone down to the land of Egypt, had at last been delivered by the hand of Moses from the bondage into which they fell in Egypt. They had come in their wilderness journey from Egypt to Kadesh-barnea where believing the report of the spies they decided not to go into the land; rather they preferred to go back to Egypt. For this, God punished them with forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Finally after the wilderness punishment had been fully accomplished God allowed them then to go back into Palestine, their homeland.

The conquest of the land is recorded for us in the book of Joshua, who was Moses' successor. Now at the death of Joshua, we come to the period of the judges. The biblical material which we consider in this message comprises the book of Judges and Ruth and the first seven chapters of I Samuel, for Samuel is a transition between the judges and the kings who followed them. The time that we are talking about is approximately three hundred years, from about 1350 B.C. to 1050 B.C.

If one were to seek a text for the book of Judges, it would not be difficult to find. The text for the book of Judges is found in the very last verse of that book. We read in this verse, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This is the sordid history of this period in the lives of God's chosen people--"every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This is elaborated on in the second chapter of Judges where we find a pattern established which is then portrayed throughout the entire book.

In the second chapter of Judges, you will notice this detailed summary of the period about which we are talking (Judges 2:11), "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim." This is the first step in the repeated history of this period. They forsook the Lord and did evil by serving false gods (vs. 12). "They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger." This is the second step. God is provoked to anger because of the actions. This is a righteous anger on God's part because of the actions of His people who should have known better, who had in their history evidences of God's power, God's love, and God's favor, but who forsook all of this for the heathen idols of the land. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against them. First, they forsook the Lord. Second, God's anger is kindled against them, and as a result of this, God delivers them to their enemies (vs. 14)--"And He delivered them into the hand of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed." God's anger was demonstrated in allowing them to be beaten in battle by their enemies.

Then there is another step in the repeated pattern of the book of Judges (vs. 2:16). "Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered

them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." God turns again in mercy and favor; always in spite of punishment, there is still mercy held out. In this instance, it is in the form of the judges whom He raises up to try to lead the people in the right way and into victory. But here is the way the people respond, "Yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so. And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groaning by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them."

In spite of the fact that God holds out mercy to them, they nevertheless reject His offer and still serve their idols. But the judges bring victory to the nation and some semblance of order and righteousness, although when the judge dies, the pattern starts all over again (vs. 19). "And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way." So here is the pattern of the book of Judges--people forsaking the Lord God, delivering them to their enemies, God giving them in mercy judges to lead them, and after the death of the judges the pattern started all over, in a worse fashion as far as the corruption of the people is concerned.

Now in the book itself, you find more than a dozen judges mentioned. Some of them are well known like Gideon who learned the lesson that it is better to have three hundred true men than a whole lot of compromisers; or like Samson who did not learn the lesson that it is better to flee temptation than to try and stay and to fight it which usually ends up as flirting with it. There is a very interesting contrast between Samson and Joseph. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he fled from the very room; when Samson was tempted by Delilah, he stayed and flirted with the temptation. The results of these two different kinds of action are very evident in the subsequent history of the two men. There is a time to flee, and it is perfectly proper to do so on many occasions.

If you want to see something of the life of the people during this period, you might read at your leisure several passages in this section. In the seventeenth chapter of Judges, you read about a man called Micah who, though he was giving lip service to the religion of his people, nevertheless made an idol in his home and found a passing Levite whom he consecrated to be his priest. This is probably the height of apostasy and compromise. Or read in the nineteenth chapter of Judges, of the sexual sins of the people in those days. Or, if you want to see the other side of the picture, read the book of Ruth which shows something of God's tender love and care in dealing for those in this period of history.

What can we learn from the period of the judges? We can learn this very important lesson. God loves and expects obedience, and God hates even what we would consider the smallest forms of compromise. The people had failed to conquer Palestine. God told them to conquer it, to destroy their enemies, but instead they flirted with their enemies

and made leagues with them and did not fully conquer the land. This act of compromise or disobedience plagued them forever. The people, even though they had seen what God could do through the judges who were raised up, went back to their old, sinful ways after the judges died.

People often ask, "Why doesn't God just step in today and intervene in human history? Then everybody would turn to Him." God intervened in the history of these people a dozen times or more with the judges, and every time after the judge died, the people went back to their sinful idolatrous ways. The trouble is not that God need to do more intervention, the trouble is with man's sinful heart. Until something is done about that, then all the intervention in the world will not be accepted by sinful men. Man needs a change. God has done all that He needs to do. God has intervened. God has intervened not only in the period of the judges whom he set over the nation, but God intervened in the sending of His son, Jesus Christ; and in that intervention, there has come the answer to all of man's need. Man, left to himself will only sink back into various forms of idolatry, various forms of worship which are false, various activities that leave God out of the picture entirely. Man needs a Savior. Man needs something done about his heart and Jesus Christ has done that in dying for the sins of mankind. All a person has to do today is to accept the gift of God's son, accept the gift of forgiveness which He holds out freely, graciously to all who will believe. This is what man needs, for the history of man in twentieth century is not less sordid than the history of men in the era of the judges.