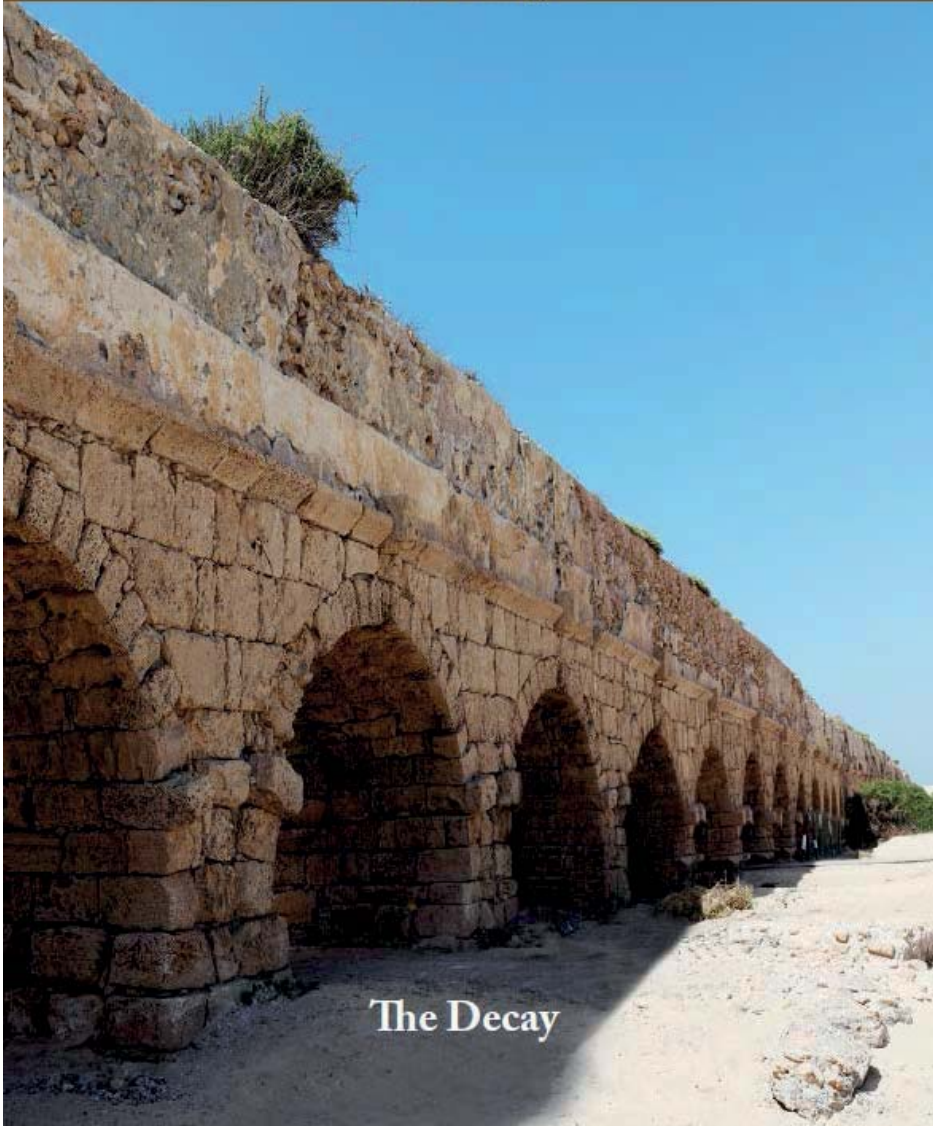


Judges Explained & Applied 07

Ger de Koning



The Decay

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Dutch version:

Judges – Toegelicht en toegepast 07

© 2019 3e druk Uitgeverij Daniël, Zwolle, NL

ISBN: 978-90-79718-62-7 (Hardback)

Web shop: www.uitgeverijdaniel.nl

Available as pdf, EPUB and MOBI file on

<https://www.oudesporen.nl/artikelen.php?lang=EN>

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Exo	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deu	Deuteronomy
2Ko	2 Korinthiërs
Jos	Joshua
Jdg	Judges
Rth	Ruth
1Sam	First Samuel
2Sam	Second Samuel
1Kgs	First Kings
2Kgs	Second Kings
1Chr	First Chronicles
2Chr	Second Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Est	Esther
Job	Job
Psa	Psalms
Pro	Proverbs
Ecc	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Songs
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Eze	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniël
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Oba	Obadiah
Jona	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zep	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zec	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Mt	Gospel of Matthew
Mk	Gospel of Mark
Lk	Gospel of Luke
Jn	Gospel of John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	Letter to the Romans
1Cor	First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor	Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal	Letter to the Galatians
Eph	Letter to the Ephesians
Phil	Letter to the Philippians
Col	Letter to the Colossians
1Thes	First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes	Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim	First Letter to Timothy
2Tim	Second Letter to Timothy
Tit	Letter tot Titus
Phlm	Letter to Philemon
Heb	Letter of the Hebrews
Jam	Letter of James
1Pet	First Letter of Peter
2Pet	Second Letter of Peter
1Jn	First Letter of John
2Jn	Second Letter of John
3Jn	Third Letter of John
Jude	Letter of Jude
Rev	Revelation

Explanation of General Format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

Preface

Introduction

The book of Judges has always had a strong attraction to the reader, including me, because of its impressive stories, which are described very realistically. When, in preparation for Bible studies and Bible lectures, I started to occupy myself intensively with this Bible book, I experienced once again the great power and topicality that comes from this part of God's Word.

In this preparation I have gratefully used what others have already passed on about this book, in word and in writing. This comment does not pretend to be original in everything. I did try to 'translate' the events of the book of Judges into our time.

In order to do this in a responsible way, I have tried as much as possible to underpin my comments from the New Testament. Scripture consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament and cannot be broken (Jn 10:35). The interpretation and application of a verse (or section) must be confirmed by another Scripture section (cf. 2Pet 1:20).

I hope that as you read, you will ask the Lord for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and that you will examine whether things are as they are presented in this comment (Acts 17:11). My prayer is that you open yourselves up to the powerful working of this part of God's Word and that its effect will be visible in your life. All for the glory of God and for the blessing of His people and yourself.

Ger de Koning

Middelburg, January 1997; translated August 2019; revised June 2022.

The Book of Judges

Introduction

The book of Judges describes the failure of the people of Israel to take possession of the land they received from God, the land of Canaan. But that's not all. We also read about the intervention of the God of mercies Who stands up for His failing people when they appeal to Him. He does not leave His people with the results of their unfaithfulness.

In short, this Bible book shows us the unfaithfulness of the people of God and the faithfulness of God. The history of professing Christianity, of which we are a part, shows the same thing. Because man has not changed, nor has God, this book appears to be topical for our time.

The importance of this Bible book for the church

The book of Judges describes the failure of God's earthly people, the people of Israel. What is the meaning and value of the book of Judges for believers of the church? The Bible itself indicates that we may learn lessons from the history of the people of God recorded in the Old Testament. The Bible even calls us to do so. It is written that all that has happened to Israel has happened to them "as examples for us" (1Cor 10:6) and that these things have happened to them "as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1Cor 10:11). In another place it says: "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction" (Rom 15:4). "In earlier times" means in the Old Testament.

It is God's purpose that we, believers of the New Testament, apply the events described in this book to the time in which we live. He even made everything happen to Israel for that purpose. By doing so, He wants to warn us so that we do not fall into the same mistakes as Israel.

The lesson for the church

The fact that it went with the church as a whole the same as with Israel is shown by the history of the church. The church has also received many blessings from God. These are not earthly blessings, as is the case with

Israel. Israel has received a piece of land full of treasures (Deu 8:7-10). The blessings received by the church are spiritual, heavenly blessings. We can find them especially in the letter to the Ephesians. In it we read that God predestined the believers "to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph 1:5), and that all believers of the church together with the Lord Jesus are above all things (Eph 1:10), and much more.

These blessings the church has received are on the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and His glorification in heaven. After He had returned to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to earth. As a result, all believers have become a unity, with one another and with the Lord Jesus in heaven. God has given these heavenly blessings to the church from the moment the church came into being through the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4; 1Cor 12:13).

At that time, the church did not yet know how rich she was. Especially the apostle Paul was used by God to make these blessings known to her. Paul wrote about this in several letters, but especially in the one to the church in Ephesus. To learn about these blessings it is therefore important that the believer reads the Bible and arranges his life accordingly. That is, he lives on earth in the consciousness that his real life is above, "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

But what has the church done with all these blessings? The church soon forgot that she is connected with the Lord Jesus in heaven and that she has such heavenly blessings. She has become more and more concerned with the things of the world, as if she belongs here on earth and not in heaven. The "first love", the most important love, the love to the Lord Jesus to Whom she owes everything, is "left" (Rev 2:4). As a result, she has ended up in a downward spiral and so little now goes out from the church.

Yet it is still possible to enjoy the blessings of God. This is the case when there is a confession of unfaithfulness and an appeal to the grace of God. Then He will give a solution, just as He did with Israel at the time. Not that the church as a whole will be restored. That has not been the case in the book of Judges with regard to Israel either. What we see, however, is that God, through the faithfulness of individuals, still gives blessings to all or part of the people. This also applies to the church today. The faithfulness of a few has positive consequences for many.

A brief review

To indicate in which period of the history of God's people the events take place in the book of Judges, it is good to look back to the book that precedes it, the book of Joshua. It tells how the people entered the land under leadership of Joshua. In Joshua 1-12 we are told about the progress made in taking possession of the land. Many enemies are defeated and a lot of land is captured.

But after Joshua 12, God says to Joshua: "Very much of the land remains to be possessed" (Jos 13:1). From Joshua 13 onward, the land is divided and each tribe is assigned its inheritance. It follows from the above that the people have two tasks:

1. what has already been conquered must be defended and
2. what is still in the hands of the enemy must be captured.

This requires battle, because the enemy does not intend to give up his territory without a blow or punch. The book of Joshua shows us the inheritance and blessing of God's earthly people, Israel. The book of Judges gives us the history of that people, how they deal with the obtained blessing in practice.

Why fight?

Could not God have made the enemy surrender in advance? Certainly, God could have done that. In Genesis 35 we read: "And the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob" (Gen 35:5 Darby Translation). He could have done something similar here. He could have let fall His terror on the enemies. He could also have simply slain them "with the breath of His mouth" (2Thes 2:8) or by "a sharp sword" coming "from His mouth" (Rev 19:15).

But God has in every time His specific way of acting with the people in general and with His people in particular. His goal is to show man that he needs Him. Only by doing everything with and for God man can be truly happy. Thus God has a special purpose with it that He allows hostile peoples to live in the land: He does so to test His people.

The test is whether they will rely on their own strength in battle or whether they trust Him. The test will show whether they want to make an effort to

own what He has given them or whether they are not interested in what God has given them. In the first case, they show that they appreciate His blessings. In the second case, they will allow the enemy to live in their midst, with the result that the enemy will rob them of their blessing. The test shows where their hearts go out to.

The final blessing

If it turns out that the people, through their unfaithfulness, are wasting all their blessings, how will the faithfulness of God turn out in the end? It will become clear that Israel will only be blessed under the rule of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who by His power will introduce the blessing and by that same power will maintain the blessing. The enemy will have no chance of robbing the people of that blessing.

The book of Ruth, which happens in the time of Judges (Rth 1:1), concludes with the name of "David" (Rth 4:22). When David becomes king, he deals with the enemies and secures the blessing for the people. In David we see a wonderful reference to the Lord Jesus, Who will do the same for His people of Israel when He returns to earth.

Decay Foretold

The decay in which the people of God have ended up and which is written in the book of Judges, is foretold by Joshua. Joshua warned of this in his farewell speech to Israel, to "their elders and their heads and their judges and their officers", which are the people with responsibility within the people (Jos 23:2). He says to them: "For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you" (Jos 23:12-13).

These prophetic words resemble Paul's words to the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:29-30). He warns them of the deviations that will come after his passing away. Ephesus is the church to which he has explained the special blessings with which God has blessed the individual believer and the church as a whole.

In the last written letter we have of Paul in the New Testament, his second letter to Timothy, he talks about the same things concerning the decay that will occur after his passing away. It is remarkable that Timothy (possibly) is then in the same Ephesus (1Tim 1:3). We see how always a parallel can be drawn between Israel then and the church now.

A prophetic application

After the period described in the book of Judges, the history of the kings Saul, David and Solomon follows. We find them in the books of Samuel and of Kings. For professing Christianity, the period of the book of Judges can be compared to the period that begins after the apostles' passing away, the post-apostolic era. This period will end with the rapture of the church.

If we compare the events that take place after the church's rapture with Saul, David and Solomon we get the following picture. After the church is raptured, the antichrist, of whom Saul is a picture, will reveal himself. The antichrist will ruin the people. But the Lord Jesus, the true David, will appear and bring the long-awaited peace for all who have looked forward to Him. To achieve that, He will judge the enemies. Immediately thereafter He will, as the true Solomon, establish the millennial kingdom of peace. These events, which will therefore take place after the church's rapture, are described in the book of Revelation from chapter 6 onward.

The history of the church on earth

A description of the history of the church on earth before she is raptured is given to us in Revelation 2 and 3. In the seven letter written in it, we find a prophetic sketch of the history of the church on earth. It becomes clear from this that the church, God's people of the New Testament, just like Israel, God's people of the Old Testament, is also departing further and further from its high calling and therefore, deteriorates. Eventually the Lord Jesus spits her out of His mouth as something disgusting (Rev 3:16).

It is striking how the description of the decay in Revelation 2 and 3 begins with the letter to Ephesus – to whom Paul had previously been able to communicate God's full counsel on the heavenly position of the church – and ends with Laodicea and her condition. In all this, it is important to keep in mind that this is about the church in her responsibility on earth and not about the church according to God's counsel.

Man spoils everything

What happens to the church is not new. It has happened to everything God has entrusted to man's responsibility. This shows how unfaithful man is by nature. It is useful and necessary to be aware of this. This will reduce our pride and moderation and increase our humility and dependence.

Everything that is made good by God is corrupted by man. A short summary shows this:

1. Look at Adam. Adam is placed in a beautiful garden, a paradise with wonderful blessings. But Adam sins and the curse comes upon creation.
2. Look at Noah. Noah is saved from the flood and enters a cleansed earth. But Noah drinks himself drunk, making himself unworthy of the authority God has given him.
3. Look at Israel. The people have only just been freed from the Egyptian bondage and they make a golden calf and God's anger must strike them.
4. With the priesthood it is not different. Almost immediately after God has ordained it, two sons of Aaron come with strange fire and God must kill them.
5. The kingship shows the same picture. The first king, Saul, turns out to be a disobedient king who fails to fulfill his mission and finally commits suicide.

Everything that has been entrusted to man decays because of man's unfaithfulness. This principle makes clear what is in man, what is in each of us. Fortunately, we always see what is in God, what sources of grace are present in Him. These sources are always available to us and we can always tap into them, especially in times of decay. If we do this, God will glorify Himself in such dark times by people who don't expect anything of themselves anymore, but everything of Him.

That's why this book contains an enormous stimulus for people who don't resign themselves because of the decay, but offer themselves to God to be used by Him. They will be a blessing to His people, and will fight the enemy in His strength.

A spiritual struggle

At the beginning and at the end of this book the same question is asked. This question is who will go first to fight (Jdg 1:1; 20:18). Between these two questions, the book takes place. The first time this question is asked, pertains to fighting against the enemies of the people. The second time this question is asked, pertains to going to fight against a brother of the people. They start by fighting together against a common enemy and end up by fighting each other.

It is a variation of what Paul says to the Galatians: "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal 3:3). Applied to Israel we can say that Israel begins in the Spirit, but ends up in the flesh. It must be said that Israel's fight against their brother Benjamin is necessary because of the sin that took place there and how their brother dealt with it.

This brings us in this introduction to another important point in the application of this book in our time. Our struggle is not against enemies of "blood and flesh", but against invisible, spiritual enemies. Our struggle is a spiritual struggle "against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual [forces] of wickedness in the heavenly [places]" (Eph 6:12). Although our enemies are not visible and tangible, they are just as real and much more pernicious than visible and tangible enemies.

The different enemies in the book of Judges represent different forms of the evil, sinful flesh and of the carnal lusts in the believer. We see how satan and his evil angels take advantage of this to persuade the believer to let himself be led by the flesh.

A child of God may know that the Lord Jesus bore the judgment of sin and robbed satan of his power on the cross. Something else is that the believer must live up to this in his life. In faith he must keep himself dead to sin (Rom 6:11).

Whenever satan, the prince of the evil powers in the heavenly places, wants to encourage us to have a sinful way of thinking or living, we must resist him. This can be done by pointing at the Lord Jesus and at the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. If we do not walk in the Spirit, we will be overcome by these things.

In practice, this works as follows. There may be a desire to enjoy the blessings in Christ. Yet these blessings are not enjoyed when the Christian is held in captivity by sinful desires he has allowed into his life. It is impossible to enjoy the heavenly blessings when worldly or carnal things are pursued. These things make him a prisoner, with the result that he has no eye and time for the things that has to do with God and the Lord Jesus.

The judges

What kind of people are the judges, where do they come from, when do they live and how do they become judge? There is a big difference in the personality of the judges we encounter in this book. They come from different tribes: Judah, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan. They all have different social backgrounds: one is a farmer, the other a diplomat, another a vagabond. Some are known, others unknown, some are rich, others poor. One of them is a woman. We will look at her special ministry in Judges 4 and 5.

These differences make it clear that God in His sovereignty determines who can be judge and He gives each one his or her own place in this. He does so according to the way they deal with Him and not on the basis of whether or not a religious education or diploma. The school of God is guaranteed to be the best education there is.

Who today are judges

As we read this book, we see that all the judges are personally raised up by God, with the exception of Abimelech who proclaims himself to be judge (Jdg 9:1-6). They are not appointed by Joshua. Nor do they become so because a committee of judges invites them to join them. Family succession is not an issue either.

Judges are a picture of elders and overseers who in our days perform their task in the local church. The fact that a woman has acted as a judge does not mean that women can also be elders or overseers in the church. God has assigned this task in the church exclusively to men. We will take a closer look at that in the history of Deborah.

These elders or overseers have not been appointed by people, just like the judges. In the Bible, the appointment of elders is done by an apostle or an authorized representative of an apostle (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Tit 1:5). Since

there are no apostles anymore and as a result there are no more persons who can act on their behalf, there can be no more appointment of elders. There is no appointment by people and no natural follow-up.

This does not mean, however, that there are no elders anymore. Paul speaks to Timothy about the characteristics to be met by a person who “aspires to the office of overseer” (1Tim 3:1). He shows the ‘profile’ that an overseer should fulfill and by which he can be recognized (1Tim 3:1-7).

Fortunately, there are still people who respond to the desire that the Lord works in them to function as an elder or overseer. They have a special eye for the dangers of the time in which we live. They will work to ensure that the enemy does not have a chance to deprive the believers of their blessings. Their task is to point out to believers areas in their lives where the enemy has made a profit. They also give indications on how the lost ground can be reclaimed.

Decreasing success of the judges

The victories won by judges are not the result of an offensive battle. They fight enemies who, through the unfaithfulness of the people, have managed to rob the people of the inheritance that God has given them. The judges will do their utmost to maintain the national existence and to let God’s people enjoy once again what belongs to them. God wants His people to be a victorious people. But the people turn away from Him again and again and follow the sins and gods of the nations around them, becoming thereby their slaves every time. The result is that all service and witnessing cease.

Judges is a book in which there is always talk of revolt against God. Every time there is a revolt, the people lose a little more of their blessing. This can be seen in the degree of redemption achieved by a judge. Each following salvation is less far-reaching than the previous one. After each domination, the people get less back than they have lost. The last judge in this book, Samson, even leaves the people in captivity. Because of personal unfaithfulness he, despite his great strength, is not able to drive the enemy away permanently. On the contrary, he himself becomes a prisoner.

But despite the increase in loss, God's grace is so great that even a time of decay can become a time of special blessing for the individual or for a remnant.

Every deliverance is always partial, until the Lord Jesus comes. When He comes, He will bring about complete deliverance.

The period when the judges judge

Between the exodus from Egypt and the building of the temple by Solomon are 480 years (1Kgs 6:1).

According to Acts 13 this period covers about 570 years (Acts 13:17-22). This results in a difference of 90 years. This difference can be explained as follows.

The 570-year period in Acts 13 is the sum of

Period	Years	Text
In the wilderness	± 40	<i>Acts 13:18</i>
Taking possession and period of judging	± 450	<i>Acts 13:20</i>
Reign of Saul	40	<i>Acts 13:21</i>
Reign of David	40	<i>1Kgs 2:11</i>
Total	± 570	

The difference of about 90 years is the sum of the five periods of slavery in Judges:

Slavery under	Years	Text
Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia	8	<i>Jdg 3:8</i>
Eglon king of Moab	18	<i>Jdg 3:14</i>
Jabin king of Canaan	20	<i>Jdg 4:3</i>
Midian	7	<i>Jdg 6:1</i>
Philistines	40	<i>Jdg 13:1</i>
Total	93	

The spiritual lesson we can learn from this is the following. God does not count the days and hours in which we live in slavery, because this time was not lived for Him. That time has no value to Him. Before Christ's judgment seat this will be revealed.

Names

Nothing in the Bible is meaningless. God has had everything written down with a special purpose. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2Tim 3:16-17). This also applies to all the names mentioned. These names have a meaning. This does not mean that the meaning of a name is always clear. Sometimes there are also multiple meanings of a name possible. However, the meaning of the name often gives us a clearer insight into the meaning of a certain section.

Many names are mentioned in the book of Judges. I want to try to stay as close as possible to that meaning in my application of the meaning. If there are multiple meanings, I will make an application that appeals to me the most. The danger with such applications is always that fantasy will play a role. It is up to the reader to read critically, in the way of the Jews in Berea of whom is mentioned: "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily [to see] whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

An important indication in connection with the meaning of names can be found in the Scriptures themselves. It is in connection with the name 'Melchizedek': "For this Melchizedek, ..., was first of all, by the translation [of his name], king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace" (Heb 7:1-2). Here the Bible itself gives proof that from the meaning of a person's name certain conclusions can be drawn that teach us something about that person or about the Person of Whom he is a picture.

There are several books with explanations of the names. I have consulted some of them. I will not go into names of which I do not know the meaning. These names do have a meaning that represents something, but I don't know what. It is good that we recognize our limitations.

Division of the book

Main division

1. Rebellion of the chosen people – Judges 1:1-3:4.
2. Slavery and deliverance – Judges 3:5-16:31.
3. The corrupt heart revealed – Judges 17:1-21:25

The subdivision per main division

1. Judges 1:1-3:4

- a. The intermingling with the nations – Judges 1:1-2:5.
- b. The open break with the LORD and the fall into idolatry - Judges 2:6-3:4.

About this subdivision it can be said that portion b. results from portion a. If the people of God are no longer separated from the world, the automatic consequence is that there will be a break with God and that they will serve the gods of the world. This is a fulfillment of the above quoted warning of the LORD from the mouth of Joshua (Jos 23:12-13). The fulfillment of these words we see in the book that we are going to take a closer look at. We will see that God is justified in His words.

2. Judges 3:5-16:31

This subdivision consists of thirteen parts, according to the number of judges that appear in it. In it we read the history of Israel's sins, which enemies are used by God to bring them to repentance, and which judges God raises up to deliver them from their enemies.

3. Judges 17:1-21:25

As in the first main division, we can distinguish two subdivisions here:

- a. Judges 17-18 show the religious decay, the abandonment of the bond with God and the filling in of the serving of God according to one's own ideas.
- b. Judges 19-21 show the moral decay, the abandonment of the mutual relationship and acting at one's own discretion without taking the other into account.

As in the first main part, subdivision b. flows from subdivision a. If the bond with God is abandoned, the bond with each other is abandoned. Where the love to God cools, the brotherly love also cools.

Judges 1

Introduction

God has not yet left Israel. His power is still present. The question only is whether there is faith present to make use of it. The cause of all decay is in the fact that the people of God forget the presence of the living, holy God in their midst. If the awareness of the value of God's presence decreases, so does dedication to Him. As a result, the people become insensitive to the evil that is in the hearts of the enemies.

If they had really experienced the presence of God in their midst, they would not have tolerated the enemy in their midst. They would have been aware that it is sin and a dishonor for God to let the enemies live in the land of God, unpunished. God and the enemy can never go together; forgetting that means losing the blessings of the land. This first chapter increasingly describes this loss.

There are five successive phases to be discovered in the way in which the decay takes place:

1. disobedience to what God has said (Verse 3);
2. lack of trust in God (Verse 19);
3. indifference (Verses 21,27,28,29,30);
4. powerlessness (Verses 31-33);
5. be conquered (Verse 34).

The origin of all decay is disobedience to what God has said. God has answered the people's question as to who shall go up first. That answer is not open to two interpretations. Judah has to go up first. He has to do that alone. Yet Judah asks Simeon to go with him.

Judah could have given all kinds of acceptable and credible reasoning for this request to Simeon. He could say, for example, that the inheritance of Simeon is closely connected to his, or that it is nice to involve others in a work for the LORD. But all these kinds of reasoning, however well intentioned, cannot invalidate the simple command of God that Judah must go first. In the course of this chapter, we will automatically come to the phases in the decay that result from this.

Verse 1 | The Successor of Joshua

1 Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"

The first verse indicates the connection with the previous book, the book of Joshua. It is the same connection that is made in the first verse of that book with the book preceding that book, the book of Deuteronomy. The book of Joshua begins with the words: "Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant" (Jos 1:1). There is a succession, and there falls, so to speak, the mantle of Moses upon another servant of the LORD, who continues his work in the spirit and power of Moses (cf. 2Kgs 2:12-14).

The book of Judges begins with the words: "Now it came about after the death of Joshua." This means that the example of the powerful active Spirit of Christ, of Whom Joshua is a picture, is no longer there. This time there is no successor either. The same applies to the time that follows the period described in the book of Acts. After the apostle Paul has disappeared from the scene, we do not hear of other apostles who have taken up his position. The question that Israel is asking here shows that the people are still one. It is a question from all of them to God. There is no question here of everyone doing what is right in their eyes. The LORD is still recognized as their Leader.

Verse 2 | Judah First

2 The LORD said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."

When the people have to go up after being delivered from Egypt and camp in the wilderness, Judah is the first one to set out (Num 2:9; 10:14). Judah has a leading position in the wilderness. Now that the land must be conquered further, we see the same thing. Here too Judah must lead the way. This is according to the prophecy of Jacob. Judah is the tribe of the lion, from which will come forth the King given by God: "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? "The scepter shall

not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him [shall be] the obedience of the peoples"" (Gen 49:9-10).

The name Judah means 'praise'. This contains the indication that a spirit of praise is the most important condition for conquering the land. Praise puts God first and means dedication to Him. Joy in obedience gives courage and enthusiasm.

Verse 3 | Judah and Simeon

3 Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you." So Simeon went with him.

As has already been mentioned, Judah is not obedient in performing God's command. Instead of counting on the help and faithfulness of God and relying on His promises, Judah calls upon Simeon's help to take possession of his inheritance. Simeon seems to be the most appropriate partner for Judah. Through the inheritance he is closely connected to him by God.

Simeon means 'to hear' and indicated fellowship. There is real fellowship only if it is based on the Word of God. Judah lacks simple faith. Human agreements never promote God's work. God has said: "I have given the land into his hand" (verse 2). That should have been enough.

How often has God been dishonored by His people by relying on something or someone outside of Him. Further on in this chapter the weakness of Judah's connection with Simeon comes to light. Despite the support of Simeon, there is no strength to drive out the enemy, who is in possession of iron chariots (verse 19b).

Doing something together has positive sides when it happens by order of God. Then it is expressed that God has given us to each other and that we need each other. Together you are stronger: "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor" (Ecc 4:9). The united, together fighting the enemy we also see in the end time, when Judah and Ephraim together attack the enemies (Isa 11:14).

Verses 4-5 | The LORD Helps

4 Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. 5 They found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Despite lack of faith with Judah the LORD helps and gives him the victory. In this we can notice the grace of God. He does not reject Judah if this tribe fails in a particular case. What matters is how much we expect from God. He wants to give us complete victories. We too, only achieve partial victories if we are not completely and in everything dependent on Him.

The victory is gained at Bezek. The name Bezek means 'break'. If there is a break in something, it is no longer whole, so the strength is gone. It can happen in the life of a believer that he no longer lives entirely for the Lord Jesus. There has been a break in his relationship with Him, perhaps through sin, perhaps through the hustle and bustle of life. Also in a local church it can happen that a break occurs between believers. Paul admonishes the believers in Corinth that they should all speak the same "and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1Cor 1:10).

Bezek is ruled by Adoni-bezek, which means 'lord of the break'. Any break in the life of the believer or in a local church is caused by the fact that the devil, the true 'lord of the break', has had the opportunity to gain a victory. It is remarkable that Israel as its first enemy meets this Adoni-bezek. Is it not also remarkable that Paul begins his exhortations to the Corinthians by pointing out to them the break in their midst?

The enemy is conquered when actions take place in obedience to the Word of God. This is how Israel does it, and this is how we should do it. In the sequel to 1 Corinthians 1 it is made clear how the enemy can be defeated. It is through "the word of the cross" (1Cor 1:18). That is, we must go back to the cross to be impressed again by what the Lord Jesus did there. On the cross, He restored every break, both in the personal life of the believer and in the life of the local church. If we confess what we have done wrong, the break will be made undone, no matter how and where it arose, and there will be restoration in the life of the believer and in the local church.

Verses 6-7 | Repaid

6 But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. 7 Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up [scraps] under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there.

That Judah and Simeon are not completely in the way of God and do not act according to His thoughts is also evident from the way they treat Adoni-bezek. They do something God has not commanded them to do. Joshua never did anything similar with the kings of Canaan. It is an act of human retribution. Nowhere in the Old Testament is there a command from God to His people to torture their enemies. Indeed, they should not feel sorry for them and should kill them without pardon, but cruel treatment is not prescribed. What the people do here does not speak in their favor.

What Adoni-bezek says about it is another matter. Adoni-bezek acted in this way to increase his power and fame. God uses the failure of Judah and Simeon to repay him. It pleads for him that in the treatment he undergoes he sees the righteous punishment of God. He acknowledges that this judgment rightly affects him. As he has done, so is he repaid.

In his case the word is fulfilled: "For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Gal 6:7b). In several histories in the Bible we come across the truth of this word. And how often have we experienced this ourselves? Man meets what he does.

Adoni-bezek's answer to the punishment he is being given is an opportunity to silence people who criticize Israel's extermination of the inhabitants of Canaan. They should listen carefully to Adoni-bezek. The judgment of the inhabitants of Canaan is righteous and deserved.

Verse 8 | Jerusalem

8 Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.

After a reference to Jerusalem in Genesis 14 – where the city is still called Salem – in Joshua 10 and the verses that follow something is said about Jerusalem for the second time in the Bible, in connection with war (Gen

14:18; Jos 10:1-5). Also here in this book the name Jerusalem is mentioned in connection with battle. War is characteristic of the entire history of this city and will be so “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Lk 21:24).

If the Lord Jesus returns from heaven to accept His delayed kingship over Israel, those times will be over. Then the city will start to answer to the meaning of its name. Jerusalem means ‘foundation or possession of peace’ – salem means ‘peace’ – because Jesus Christ will reign there as the Prince of peace.

The conquest of Jerusalem by Judah is not complete. Despite the destruction of Jerusalem, the enemy has the opportunity to regroup and resist (verse 21).

Verse 9 | The Canaanites

9 Afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country and in the Negev and in the lowland.

Canaan is a son of Ham, the son of Noah (Gen 10:6). Noah curses Ham in his son Canaan. The history of the descendants of Canaan makes clear how this curse has taken shape. They live in the land which God has given to His people as an inheritance, but they have corrupted the land by their iniquity. They use the land of God for their own pleasures.

In Genesis 15, the Canaanites, along with nine other nations, are mentioned as inhabitants of the land (Gen 15:18-21; cf. Deu 7:1; Jos 3:10). In the land they form a separate group of inhabitants among the other inhabitants. In other texts the name Canaanites seems to be a collective name for all the inhabitants of the land (Gen 12:6; Jos 17:12-13; Neh 9:24).

What the Canaanites Represent

The Hebrew word *canaan* has been translated in some places as ‘merchants’ (Job 41:6; Isa 23:8). This immediately makes clear the spiritual meaning of this word. Canaanites represent people who make the things of God a business from which you can have profit. It is that kind of people of whom we read: “Men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (1Tim 6:5). Canaan represents a way of thinking where one is only interested in his own benefit, while

there is no place for the will of God. It is purely the own will which is aimed at satisfying the own lusts.

This enemy is difficult to eradicate. He lurks in the hearts of all who are part of the people of God. Every member of God's people must be aware of it. For example, he asserts himself when we have done something that arouses admiration with others. We can capitalize on this by committing others to us. The tribute that is given to us will be used to manipulate others and to make them work for our own purposes. Then, so to speak, God will not gain from it, but we ourselves. The result of what we do must be to glorify God and not us.

This 'merchant-mentality' is strongly expressed in the roman-catholic church. We even read from this church that it trades in "bodies and souls of people" as it literally says (Rev 18:11-13). For example, we can think of the indulgences, of which in the roman-catholic church there is indeed a trading in souls. God will judge this merchant system, which bears the name 'church'.

As said, every child of God must take into account the activity of this enemy in its own heart and life. We must not feel sorry for him. He must be judged radically. This is done by giving him the place where he belongs, that is in the death. Then we will fulfill the task of considering our members of our earthly body as dead. Those members are "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry" (Col 3:5). We can see those members as an effect of the corrupt thinking mentioned in the just quoted verse from 1 Timothy 6 (1Tim 6:5).

Every member is an enemy. Anyone who thinks he can be good buddies with one such member will be defeated by it. The Canaanite seizes its chance. Land is being lost. The blessings of God are no longer enjoyed. The Canaanites will make sure that we do not live in our cities, that is, that we will not enjoy any particular truth of Christ or anything valuable of Him that belongs to us. The way to being a slave of sin has been taken, until we are again fully slave.

Verses 10-12 | Caleb

10 So Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron formerly [was] Kiriath-arba); and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman

and Talmi. 11 Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly [was] Kiriath-sepher). 12 And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife."

Judah moves on. His next goal is Hebron. The meaning of this name is 'fellowship'. This city was first owned by the Canaanites who gave the city the name Kiriath-arba. Kiriath-arba means 'city of giants'. In reality not the tribe of Judah, but the individual Caleb has conquered this city (Jos 15:14-15). The fact that the capture of Hebron is attributed to the tribe shows that Caleb puts the mark of his personal faithfulness, strength, perseverance and faith on the whole tribe. The faith of the individual is attributed to the whole.

Caleb is not afraid of the giants. He has already shown this when he returns as one of the twelve spies to Moses with his account of what he has seen in the land (Num 13:30; 14:6-10,24,38). Ten spies have been impressed by the amazingly strong walls of the cities and the amazing giants that live there. According to them, they can never win. But the language of Caleb is different. The reason for this is that he does not compare the walls and the giants with himself and his own strength, but with God. What do thick walls and giants mean to the almighty God?

This faith shines between so much unbelief and deviation. This is also the case today in the church, where, in the midst of general decay, personal faithfulness is found. This faithfulness is found among men and women who do not compare the difficulties with themselves, but put them quietly in the hand of the Lord and trust that He is above the circumstances and indicates a way of victory in them. Personal faithfulness still benefits the whole today. A 'city of giants' is then transformed into a city of 'fellowship'. Where faith chases away the enemy, there is fellowship with God and His people instead.

The conquest of Kiriath-sepher connects to this. Kiriath-sepher means 'the city of the book'. This is the name of the city when it is in the hands of the enemy. Possibly it is a center of Canaanite scholarship. Today we might call it a 'university city'. The new name given to this city is Debir which means '(a living) oracle' or 'speaking of God'.

We can also learn a lesson from this. To unbelievers, or to people who pretend to be Christians, but have no life from God, the Bible is just a book.

However, as soon as one receives new life through repentance and new birth, this book becomes “the Word of God” which “is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12). Many have testified that through the new life they have started to see and read the Bible differently. What seemed like a dead letter at first, is going to live.

We will encounter ‘the Bible’, the Word of God, in the book of Judges in many more pictures. Victory over our spiritual enemies is only achieved if we make the Word of God our own by living according to it. Especially for elders or overseers, of whom the judges are also a picture, it is important that they know the Word of God. They must be able to teach (1Tim 3:2).

Verse 13 | Othniel

13 Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife.

There is another important aspect to Caleb’s attitude and behavior, and that is that he encourages others to behave in the same way. By his example he wakes this up in others. That’s still how it works. The faithfulness of the individual arouses others to act in this way. The name ‘Caleb’ means, among other things, ‘wholeheartedly’. It always comes down to an undivided heart. Whosoever serves and trusts God with all his heart achieves victories of faith. The spark of this enthusiasm of faith then jumps over to others, as here to Othniel.

The name Othniel means ‘lion of God’ or ‘my power is God’. In him we see an example of the heroism of faith. The cause of this lies not in his own power but in the power of God. He relies on that. Caleb’s proposal finds connection with him through the example he saw in Caleb.

An additional incentive is the reward that Caleb is promising. He promises that whoever takes Kiriath-sepher will have his daughter Achsah as his wife. This was not said to deaf ears in the case of Othniel.

Verse 14 | Achsah

14 Then it came about when she came [to him], that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you want?”

Achsah will certainly have been an attractive woman. Nevertheless, Othniel will not have appreciated her primarily for her outer beauty. What kind of woman she is, is apparent from her name, her attitude, and her behavior. Her name means ‘ankle adornment’. This indicates that her walk, her way of life, is to the glory of God. She resembles the woman mentioned in 1 Peter 3 (1Pet 3:1-6). There is talk there about adornment several times. In her walk she is one who lives up to what God has said.

In the New Testament it says of the slaves that they “will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Tit 2:9-10). To be able to adorn ‘the doctrine of God’, that is the teaching that God gives through His Word, we also need to know that doctrine. Achsah is interested in what God has said and promised. This determines her attitude and behavior. It is to be hoped that every Christian woman will follow her example.

This also applies to every Christian man. He may gain profit from what his wife radiates. Not only the Christian woman, but also the Christian man is responsible for adorning ‘the doctrine of God’ with his life. Through our way of life we adorn or disfigure ‘the doctrine of God’. It is about putting into practice what we have learned from God’s Word.

Caleb, Achsah and Othniel all belong to the tribe of Judah, that is, they all belong to the tribe whose name means ‘praiser of God’ or ‘praise’. A walk in faith and trust follows from the praise of God. Whoever is thankful to God for His great goodness will show through his life that that gratitude is real. His life will become, as it were, one great praise to God. He will bring his life more and more into conformity with the Word of God. This is the inevitable consequence in the life of someone whose heart goes out to God and to what He has said.

Verse 15 | Achsah Asks for and Gets Springs of Water

15 She said to him, “Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water.” So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

Achsah is a beautiful woman, not only because of her outer beauty. This is not only reflected in the meaning of her name. What also makes her so attractive is her mindset, her behavior. This shows her actual, inner beauty. Precisely because of her mindset she is a great complement to Othniel.

Achsah possesses something of her father's spirit. She is not satisfied with just having a property. She wants it to be a fertile property. The Negev is a land of sunshine and warmth, of fertility and beauty, but she wants to have something in it that enables her to fully enjoy that piece of land and that are springs of water. Caleb gives what she asks for. He gives her the upper springs and the lower springs.

We too can know that we 'own a piece of land'. With us this is in connection with spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. However, enjoying it is something else than just owning it. An example can be found in the life of the apostle Paul. He speaks of 'the upper springs' when he speaks of 'abundance'. For example, in the letter to the Romans, he speaks of "the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many" (Rom 5:15,20). He also mentions in that letter "that you will abound in hope" (Rom 15:13). In his second letter to the Corinthians, he writes that "our comfort is abundant through Christ" (2Cor 1:5) and later he says: "I am overflowing with joy" (2Cor 7:4).

Grace, hope, comfort, joy, it is all to be found in Christ in heaven. From these springs the believer can always draw, even if for him not everything prospers and grows. Then he knows that in Christ, the upper Spring, there is refreshment to be found that cannot be affected by adversity.

There are also the lower springs. Paul speaks of this when he speaks of 'suffering need' (Phil 4:12), of times of trial. An example of this can also be seen in the second letter to the Corinthians when he says: "For when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need" (2Cor 11:9). It is a refreshment when there are brothers who help us in our need. That is a refreshment from a lower spring than the refreshment we receive from the Lord Himself. Yet the result of the refreshment is the same. We experience the blessing of the land when drinking from both springs.

The refreshment we receive from both the upper and lower springs makes the Lord Jesus greater. God is glorified when we ask great and good things of Him. We should not reduce Him to the limitation of our thoughts. He has brought His people into a good land, and it is His desire to bless them there. God has also brought us into a good land and all He wants is to bless us there.

Unfortunately, we see that even in our time only few believers show the interest and commitment for the blessing we see in Achsah. There is an added application. Achsah is the wife of Othniel, who in our time represents an overseer in the church, someone who leads the people of God. Overseers are people who only function properly if they have a wife of the caliber of Achsa at their side. She is someone who encourages spiritual activity.

Verse 16 | The Kenites

16 The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people.

Opposite the “spirit of ... power and love and discipline” (2Tim 1:7) of Caleb, Achsah and Othniel are the Kenites. The Kenites come from Midian, to which also belonged the wife of Moses (Exo 2:15-21). Midian is a descendant of Abraham through his wife Ketura (Gen 25:1-2). Because of this, Midian is connected with Israel in a double way, namely through Moses as well as through Abraham.

It seems that the Kenites, at the invitation of Moses, went with the people when Israel left Egypt (1Sam 15:6). Yet they have never made themselves one with the people of God. It may be that Israel is a kind of nest for the Kenites, but not more than that (Num 24:21). This verse seems to confirm this (cf. Jdg 4:17).

They do go up with the sons of Judah, but they go to live with Harad, without any fight. They will just live there “with the people”. They are people who maintain their wilderness habits while living in the land of blessing. They benefit from the security that the land gives them, without worrying about the blessings that the land contains. They adapt easily to their surroundings.

The meaning of the name Harad is in line with this. Harad means ‘place of the wild donkey’. A wild donkey represents a person who thinks and acts according to his own nature, without having a connection with God. To that place the Kenites go to live.

In professing Christianity we meet people who resemble the Kenites. These are people who talk a lot about the things of God, while their daily lives show that they're busy with the things of men. They "are not setting" their "mind on God's interests, but man's" (Mt 16:23).

Let us be careful not to resemble them. This can happen if we feel comfortable with the people of God because they offer some protection, but we do not want to identify too much with them. We also feel at home with the people of the world. This kind of half-heartedness is not an adornment for someone who knows the blessings with which God has blessed him in Christ. Therefore we see this contrast between the Kenites and Caleb and his family.

Verse 17 | Stand in the Victory

17 Then Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah.

After this section about the Kenites we follow Judah again in his fight to take possession of the piece of land he has been assigned. Now it even seems that Simeon took the initiative because we read: "Judah went with Simeon his brother." Together with his brother Simeon, he goes to the Canaanites who live in Zephath. After this city is captured, it is named Hormah, which means 'ban curse' or 'total destruction'. The meaning of that name shows the way Judah and Simeon deal with this city. In this they act in accordance with God's will and for their own good.

An enemy that has been completely destroyed will no longer bother us. Our problem is that we often do not break with the world radically enough. That will backfire on us at some moment. All too often we give the enemy the opportunity to recover from a defeat.

If the Lord Jesus says: "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33), then we may regard the world as a conquered enemy. We can stand in the victory. The old apostle John encourages his readers with this: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1Jn 5:4). By the faith that works in the new nature, we will not give in

to the temptations of the world. Our faith focuses on Him Who has conquered the world.

Verse 18 | Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron

18 And Judah took Gaza with its territory and Ashkelon with its territory and Ekron with its territory.

Gaza means ‘the strong one’, Ashkelon probably means ‘trekking’ and Ekron means ‘infertility’. These three cities with their corresponding areas are also taken by Judah. These three cities are three of the five capitals of the Philistines. The Philistines will be discussed in detail in the course of this book.

Verse 19 | The Weakness of Judah

19 Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots.

Judah overcomes and takes possession of territory because God is with him and he relies on Him. This is an encouragement for all those who dare to engage in spiritual struggle. The Lord is always with those who go with Him. Doing what He says means having Him with us. And which enemy is equal to us then? With the Lord we are stronger than any enemy. Without the Lord, we lose out to the weakest enemy.

Yet there is still something lacking in Judah’s faith. “But they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots.” What’s the matter? God is with Judah if he keeps to the word God has spoken to kill all enemies. Unfortunately, Judah does not fully trust God. He gets scared of the iron chariot. This stems from a lack of trust in Him, which is already evident from the fact that He has asked Simeon to go with Him (verse 3). For God, iron chariots are no problem at all (Jos 11:4,6,9; 17:18).

Whoever does not consider God’s power sufficient limits his victory. It is likewise with the walls of the cities and the giants in the land. He who compares it to his own strength, fades away, but he who compares it to God sees no difficulty at all. This is not to belittle the problem, but to bring it back to the proportions that apply to faith.

In Daniel 2 the force of iron is described (Dan 2:40). Nothing can resist the power of iron if we compare it to human power. But what is the power of iron for God? God breaks the iron with His mighty arm. For Him it is nothing more than “chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found” (Dan 2:35). Our problem is often that we think too little of God, so we measure everything by our own abilities. Then it turns out that we are not able to overcome a certain problem, which is to the dishonor of God and to harm and disgrace for ourselves.

Verse 20 | Once Again Caleb

20 Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak.

Caleb’s attitude here forms a contrast with Judah as before with the Kenites. Where Judah fails, the faith of the individual prevails. Caleb is not afraid of the giants, like the ten spies at the time. He doesn’t feel like a grasshopper in their eyes, but he turns it around: the giants are grasshoppers in God’s eyes.

Verse 21 | Benjamin

21 But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

After the detailed description of the fate of Judah and Simeon, the successes, or rather the failures of the other tribes, are quickly described. After Judah has not been able to expel the enemy (verse 19), it sounds like a recurring refrain in verses 21-36 that they “did not drive out” the enemies (verses 21,27,28,29,30,31,32,33).

The next one is Benjamin. The enemy defeated in verse 8 does appear to not have been completely defeated. There is one part left and that part is resisting fiercely. Perhaps this was possible because Judah has only conquered his own part of the city. Jerusalem lies on the border of Judah and Benjamin, so each of these tribes has a part of the city. Whatever the case, the enemy never sees himself as being defeated and is even able to survive because of the unfaithfulness of God’s people.

It is pure indifference that makes Benjamin let the enemy live in his midst. After all, Benjamin is the tribe of war. In his prophecy Jacob describes him like this: “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, and in the evening he divides the spoil” (Gen 49:27). The name Benjamin means ‘son of my right hand’ and the right hand speaks of strength. Christ will soon reign on earth as the true Benjamin, as the true Son of God’s right hand. To this end, He will appear to judge. Now He is still in heaven. “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

Benjamin forgot what was said about him. He is unfaithful to his calling by indifference. Benjamin represents our place in Christ. If we forget that we are seated in Christ in the heavenly places and that we have a place in Him at God’s right hand, we become indifferent to the world around us and insensitive to the evil that reigns. We lose strength and the enemy can continue to influence us.

Verses 22-26 | Joseph

22 Likewise the house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. 23 The house of Joseph spied out Bethel (now the name of the city was formerly Luz). 24 The spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, “Please show us the entrance to the city and we will treat you kindly.” 25 So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go free. 26 The man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and named it Luz which is its name to this day.

Here we read about Joseph. Although the LORD is with him, as with Judah, we have indications here too that he does not fully trust the LORD. He goes up against Bethel in faith, and therefore is the LORD with him. But then he starts sending out spies. Has the LORD commanded this? This reminds of the history in Joshua 2, where Joshua orders to spy out the land. The difference is that there it is a work of faith and that is missed here. The man from Luz turns out to be a traitor. Instead of joining the people of God, like Rahab, he builds up the city destroyed by the LORD.

Time and again we are reminded that we should not trust or let any enemy escape. In spiritual matters we cannot profit from ideas of the world, of

which Joseph's negotiations with the man from Luz are a picture. In the long run, we will end up being deceived. It seems that we will benefit from it, but that is only for a short time. Anything that we justify in our lives, when it is something of the enemy, of the flesh or of our own will, will at some point turn against us. Just like here with the man from Luz. The whole city is destroyed, but that man and his family they let go.

The names show us the lesson in their meaning. Bethel means 'house of God', Luz means 'separation' and Hittites stands for 'children of horror'. The name of the city is first Luz, 'separation'. As such, it is in the possession of the enemy. Separation is a biblical truth, but it can be taught and put into practice in a reverse, unbiblical way. Thus, this biblical truth becomes 'property' of the enemy.

An example of this we see with the Pharisees. Their name means 'separated'. There are positive exceptions among them, but in general the Pharisees are a group within the Jewish people that have separated themselves from the common people. They find themselves more holy than the rest. A few times the Lord Jesus calls them hypocrites. In Matthew 23 he denounces their hypocrisy in sharp words. They are characterized by tying up "heavy burdens" and laying "them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with [so much as] a finger" (Mt 23:4). This Pharisaism is in our blood.

This enemy must be dealt with. Then Luz can be renamed: Bethel, that means 'house of God'. In the house of God today, the church, God dwells (1Tim 3:15). All who have life from God also live there. If the wrong separation has disappeared from our lives, we can put the good separation into practice. Good separation is separation to God, it is serving Him in His house with dedication. To be in His presence means to take into account that He is the holy God Who cannot tolerate any evil. The Psalmist says of God's house: "Holiness befits Your house, O LORD, forevermore" (Psa 93:5b).

Another example of wrong separation is to live as a monk. Without judging the motives that lead someone to such a life, the principle of monastic life is alien to Scripture. It presupposes a special sanctification to God that goes so far, that one separates oneself from the ordinary affairs of life in

the world to dedicate oneself to the higher things. What is forgotten, is that sin is in the heart of man. This wrong, outward form of separation must be overcome.

It is regrettable that in some respects we are still maintaining this wrong separation. This wrong will certainly become stronger over time. The Hittites, meaning 'the children of horror', find a breeding ground there. Those who do not get rid of the Pharisaism in their lives will sooner or later be dominated by Pharisaism. The consequence of this will be that his life has a horrible influence on others.

Verses 27-28 | Manasseh and the Canaanites

27 But Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land. 28 It came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely.

From what is said about Manasseh, we get the impression that he has not taken full possession of any place. The whole region that has been allocated to him continues to breathe the Canaanite atmosphere. Although the Canaanites have become servants and their power has been broken in some way, they have managed to maintain themselves. Their will is stronger than the will of Manasseh. The will of the heathen peoples still has a strong influence on the weak people of God.

The influence of the world is a danger that threatens all Christians. The enemy may be obliged to acknowledge his superior in the believer, but when we 'negotiate' with him, he remains alive. We can be aware that the flesh should not be allowed to assert itself while at the same time we use it to achieve our goal. A certain Christian, for example, can speak well. For all sorts of reasons, he comes into a bad light, without being guilty. Will he now pull all his oratorical talent out of the stops to prove his innocence, or will he surrender it "to Him who judges righteously" (1Pet 2:23)?

We can also look at our reaction when a brother has wronged us. Do we then go to the worldly court or do we rather be wronged (1Cor 6:6-7)?

Verses 29-30 | Ephraim and Zebulun

29 Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them. 30 Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor.

Ephraim and Zebulun also let the enemies live in their midst, they tolerate their presence. They do not realize that tolerating their enemies is dishonoring God. It is sin. It simply means an indifferent attitude to God's land that He has given to all of Israel.

Verses 31-33 | Asher and Naphtali

31 Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob. 32 So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out. 33 Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; and the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced labor for them.

Asher and Naphtali make it even worse. They live in the midst of the enemies themselves, so they are more or less absorbed by the nations. Here the roles are reversed. The unfaithfulness of the people is having ever greater consequences. Now it is not the enemies living among the Israelites, which also means unfaithfulness to God, but the Israelites now live among the enemies. The enemies continue to control the land and tolerate the Israelites in their midst. What a weakness among the people!

It resembles someone who is a Christian, who has new life, but who is dictated in his life by his flesh, by his own thoughts. These thoughts are not formed by fellowship with God, but by fellowship with people and opinions of the world.

Verses 34-36 | Dan, the Amorites and the House of Joseph

34 Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley; 35 yet the Amorites persisted in living in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim; but when the power of

the house of Joseph grew strong, they became forced labor. 36 The border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward.

The tribe of Dan is the worst off. He cannot drive out the enemies, on the contrary, the enemies drive out the Danites from their inheritance. It is the last phase of the deterioration described in this chapter. The blessing of the land is no longer enjoyed in any way.

The attitude of the tribe of Dan is the same as that of the Christian who is completely absorbed by the things of the world. Certainly, he says he is still a Christian, sometimes he is in a Christian meeting, but his life and his speech hardly show anything that he is a real Christian. There is nothing to show that he likes to hear or talk about the things of God and the Lord Jesus. At home, his Bible remains closed and he does not think of praying.

The Amorites are the first enemies that Israel has met and defeated on its way to the promised land. In connection with the Amorite, God says to His people: "begin to take possession and contend with him in battle" (Deu 2:24). This battle takes place before the people have gone through the Jordan. It is a region that is not in the promised land, but on the wilderness side of the Jordan.

Therefore, it does not speak of spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, but of earthly blessings. These blessings must also be conquered; we should thank God also for all earthly blessings. By earthly blessings we can understand things like health, a good marriage, a satisfying job, an invigorating time of relaxation. These are not our actual spiritual, heavenly and eternal blessings. We have earthly blessings in common with unbelievers. The only difference is that the Christian accepts these things from God's hand and thanks Him for it, while the unbeliever does not.

But when the Christian takes such blessings for granted and even lives for them, he is spiritually driven out of his inheritance by the Amorites. He does his utmost to stay healthy, forgetting that he is in God's hand; he does his utmost to keep his marriage good and never has time to serve someone else spiritually; his job is all for him, he is a real workaholic, which is at the expense of visiting Christian meetings; he does his utmost to make his next vacation an even greater success than the previous one: studying travel guides, weighing the different destinations, taking in as much information

as possible, to be fully prepared to go to the chosen destination. But there is no interest, no commitment, no time for what God has prepared for those who love Him.

Fortunately, Joseph's house is so attentive that it stops the Amorites. Fortunately, there are still people in the people of God who have an eye for the dangers of earthly blessings. Let us listen to them and make a profit from them.

Judges 2

Introduction

Judges 1 deals with the decay of the Israelites with regard to the peoples around them, the world. They have been unfaithful in taking possession of the land and have not driven out the enemies.

Judges 2 is about decay with regard to God. They turned their back on God and began to serve the idols. This chapter provides a summary of the entire book. This summary shows that we are dealing with a kind of vicious circle, a cycle that keeps recurring in the following chapters. This cycle consists of the following steps:

1. The people leave God.
2. God uses enemies to awaken their conscience.
3. The people call to the LORD.
4. The LORD gives them in His mercy a judge to deliver them.

Then the cycle starts again:

1. The people leave God.
2. God uses ... and so on.

In Psalm 107 we find something similar. We read first about need, then the call to the LORD, after which their salvation follows, after which He is praised. The chorus in that psalm is formed by the words “then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble” (Psa 107:6,13,19,28).

Verse 1 | The LORD Goes From Gilgal to Bochim

1 Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you,

In general, the Old Testament uses the name “Angel of the LORD” to denote the appearance of God in a visible form. Only in the New Testament is God “revealed in the flesh” (1Tim 3:16). He has become visible in the Lord Jesus. When the Lord Jesus is born, God is visible to men. Those who

believe in Him see God in Him (1Jn 1:1). The Lord Jesus is the incarnate Word (Jn 1:14). The eternal Son has become Man (1Jn 5:20).

Also in the Old Testament, God appeared to people in Christ. There He takes the form of an Angel. There are some Scriptures which make clear that 'the angel of the LORD' means God (Gen 16:7-14; 22:11,15,16). From what the Angel of the LORD says in those verses, it appears that He is none but God Himself.

If we compare the first verses of Isaiah 6 with the quote of these verses in John 12, we see something else special (Isa 6:1-5; Jn 12:37-41). Then we see that Yahweh, the LORD of the Old Testament, is the same as the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. If the context shows that "the Angel of the LORD" is an appearance of God, then this is in reality the Lord Jesus.

"Gilgal" is of great strategic importance in the book of Joshua. It forms the base camp, the place from which the Israelites always go out to conquer the land. They always return to that place. Shortly after they entered the land of Canaan through the Jordan, circumcision takes place at Gilgal. By this deed, the reproach of Egypt has been rolled away (Jos 5:2-9).

The significance of circumcision for us is found in Colossians 2 (Col 2:11). In this verse we clearly see that for the Christian, circumcision is not a literal matter, but that it has a spiritual significance. We are not circumcised with a circumcision made with "hands" – that would have meant a literal circumcision – but we are circumcised "by the circumcision of Christ". The latter does not speak of what happened to Christ when He is eight days old (Lk 2:21), but of what happened to Him on the cross when He received God's judgment on sin. On the cross in Him the flesh is judged with the judgment of death.

Just as Israel has always returned to Gilgal to be remembered, as it were, to God's judgment on the 'I', the nature of man, so we have to go back to the cross again and again to realize who we are by nature. There is no strength in us to conquer the land. The power for this can only be found in a dead and raised Christ. This means that the death of Christ must be applied every time, that is to say that we must condemn all kinds of manifestations of the flesh that may arise in us (Col 3:5).

Gilgal represents the spiritual circumcision of the heart that precedes victory and gives the heart new strength to overcome in battle. Gilgal speaks of a constant self-judgment. We are called up to this self-judgment. If we do not, we will be judged by the Lord, that is, disciplined by Him. "But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world" (1Cor 11:31-32).

The Angel of the LORD leaves Gilgal and goes to Bochim. Bochim means 'weeping'. It is a place of tears. These are tears for lost blessings. Doesn't it make us feel sad to see how the people have deviated from God and have left Him? Those who do not know this grief do not know where the Spirit of God dwells. Bochim reflects the character of the church in decay. It is presumptuous to assume that one possesses great power in our time. The days of Joshua and Gilgal have been days of power and joy, but they are over now forever. The spirit of Laodicea comes to light when we say that we are rich and enriched, while in reality we are blind, naked and poor (Rev 3:17).

But a place of weeping can become a place of blessing. Then we must take that place of sorrow, of humiliation because of our unfaithfulness. Then the valley of Baca can be made "a spring", as it is so beautifully said in Psalm 84 (Psa 84:6). The word baca is related to Bochim and means 'tears'.

The Lord Jesus is as it were in 'Bochim' when He stands at the tomb of Lazarus. We read of Him that He "wept" there (Jn 11:35). Paul also knows this place (Phil 3:18; cf. 2Cor 2:4). The LORD points out to Ezekiel people who live in 'Bochim'. He says of them that they are "the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst [that is in Jerusalem]" (Eze 9:4).

The Angel of the LORD makes a solemn declaration for the reason of His departure from Gilgal. This declaration makes a deep impression on the people. He begins by reminding them that He has freed them from Egypt. That the Angel of the LORD says that He did this, underlines that the Angel is God Himself. He goes back to the origin of their existence as a people. They are a slave people in Egypt, but God has delivered them from the power of Pharaoh. This shows His great love for them.

If we know deviations in our personal lives, God will also always remind us of our deliverance from the power of sin. The main cause of any deviation is that we forget what salvation God has worked for us in the surrender of His Son on the cross.

The reminder of the redemption from Egypt is mentioned more often in this book (verse 12; Jdg 6:8; 10:11). God does this to awaken His people. The Angel of the LORD also speaks about the land in which they now live. He brought them there because of the oath which He sworn to their fathers (Gen 17:7-8). What He has promised, He has done.

This is also a great certainty for us. God will live up to what He has said. He does this not because of our faithfulness, but because of what the Lord Jesus did. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3).

Verse 2 | What Is This You Have Done?

2 and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?

God has done what He promised, but the people have disobeyed. The conditions for enjoying God's blessings have not been fulfilled by Israel. They did not keep themselves separated from the people of Canaan, but mixed with them by marrying the inhabitants of the land. They did not destroy the altars of the nations, with the result that they have sacrificed to the gods of those nations, which means that they have sacrificed to the demons (Deu 32:17; 1Cor 10:20).

Penetratingly, the question comes to them: "What is this you have done?" This question must go through their marrow and bone. It should lead them to reflection, repentance and acknowledgment of debt. God asks such questions more often in the Bible. He says to Adam: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) and Adam must come out. God asks Hagar: "Where have you come from and where are you going?" (Gen 16:8).

God also has His questions for us when we have deviated. By doing so, He wants to bring us back on topic, to see the senselessness or sinfulness of our activities or of the way we go. We can then confess it and refocus on

what God wants to give us. With this we honor Him and He fills our lives with joy and peace.

God has a double reason for the total destruction of Israel's enemies. The first reason is the punishment for their sins. The second reason is to protect His people from the inevitable influence of the idols of Canaan. The latter is also the reason why we should not engage with the world and its thinking. We too are easily influenced by all the contacts we have (1Cor 15:33). If we become less aware of God's presence in our lives, it is because the world and its spirit have influenced us.

Verse 3 | Who Does Not Want to Hear ...

3 Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they will become [as thorns] in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.'"

When the people have made themselves one with the nations around them, God gives them over to those nations. They will have to learn through experience what the consequences are of leaving Him. The people must also gain this experience under King Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Because he has forsaken the law of the LORD and all Israel with him, the LORD sends Shishak, king of Egypt, to discipline them (2Chr 12:1-5,8). By experiencing the power of the enemy, we experience how cruel this enemy is and we long for relationship with God again.

It is as with the youngest son from the parable the Lord Jesus tells in Luke 15. This boy thinks he will be better off somewhere else than with his father. He leaves his father, but in the faraway country he discovers that the world is hard. Then he longs for his father again (Lk 15:12-20). There we see how it goes when God can no longer reach us in another way to repent. He will let us experience in His love the difference between serving Him and doing His will on the one hand and serving the world and doing our own will on the other hand.

Verse 4 | The Reaction of the People

4 When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept.

The LORD has spoken, and the people react with weeping. They see that they have acted the other way around. The admonition has been understood clearly and they acknowledge their unfaithfulness. Yet there is not much to be seen of real repentance. What they express is more the grief over the lost blessings.

Someone who has forsaken the Lord may acknowledge that he sinned without truly repenting of his deeds. Several times we read in the Bible about people who say “I have sinned”. This sounds for example from the mouth of Pharaoh and from that of Judas (Exo 10:16; Mt 27:3-4). It appears, however, that they only regret the consequences that their actions have for them. They do not repent of what they have done to God. In this context, the Bible speaks of the difference between “the sorrow that is according to [the will of] God” and “the sorrow of the world” (2Cor 7:10).

Verse 5 | Sacrifices

| *5 So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD.*

About Bochim something is said in the discussion of verse 1. Now it is mentioned that they call this place Bochim because the people have wept there. This makes it clear once again that the names in the Bible have a meaning. It is also mentioned here that they sacrifice to the LORD at that place. Despite the little depth in their sorrow about the wrong, there is a need in their hearts to sacrifice to Him.

This is something to be pleased about. Unlike with Pharaoh and Judas, the Israelites have a bond with the LORD. It is not clear how much gratitude is expressed by these sacrifices. Given the decay, it may not be much. Yet they did it. They have made the place of tears a place of sacrifice.

This combination of tears and sacrifice is also beautifully expressed by the “woman in the city who was a sinner” (Lk 7:37). With her tears she wets the feet of the Lord Jesus and then anoints them with perfume. In the tears we see the grief over her sins and in the perfume we see a sacrifice to the Lord, because she understands Who He is. What the Lord Jesus says of her shows how much He appreciates what she has done. His words also clearly show her sense of sin. Precisely because of this she has conceived a great love for the Savior (Lk 7:38-50).

The Lord connects to her conduct a lesson for the Pharisee Simon and over his head for all of us. He tells about two debtors, one of whom has a small debt and the other a large debt. This debt is waived to both of them. If the question comes up as to who will be most thankful, the answer is not difficult: of course the one of whom the biggest debt has been remitted. The lesson is that out of our love for the Lord and our devotion to Him is seen how great the awareness is of the guilt of sin that has been forgiven us.

Paul knows like no other the grace God has given him. He calls himself of all sinners “foremost” (1Tim 1:15). This has made him the most dedicated servant who has ever lived. We will follow in his footsteps if we always realize all that has been forgiven us. Our whole life will then become a sacrifice to the Lord (Rom 12:1).

Verse 6 | Each His Inheritance

6 When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land.

The writer of Judges then tells a part of the history of Israel. That story runs from here, verse 6, to Judges 3:6. He begins with the happy situation that exists, when each tribe has received its inheritance and started to live in it (Jos 21:43-45). It is wonderful to read there how the LORD has given them rest on all sides. He has fulfilled all the good promises He has promised. At the time, the people really lack nothing.

Every Christian is also fully placed in the blessing God has wanted to give him. Nothing is withheld from him. We can read it in Ephesians 1 (Eph 1:3-14). If we only shortly know the Lord Jesus, we will fully enjoy it. Just like with Israel, everything is fresh and alive in the beginning. The same applies to professing Christianity as a whole.

In Acts we read how the first Christians live, of which they are full, what they do for the Lord Jesus and for each other. Then they do not yet know much about the blessings that the church has received in Christ. This was only later made known by Paul. But through their way of life, they are spiritually able to understand and enjoy the teaching of these blessings. They are happy about it and show it in their lives. It is in keeping with their focus on God and His Word.

Verse 7 | The First Time in the Land

7 The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

After this brilliant start, the shine of the blessings remains visible for some time. The people serve the LORD in the days of Joshua and in the days of the elders who survived Joshua (Jos 24:31). However, there are already idols in the days of Joshua, so the germ for later aberration is present (Jos 24:14). About such a germ Paul speaks in relation to the church when he writes that in his days “the mystery of lawlessness” is already at work (2Thes 2:7). In the days of John we see how this germ has already developed into “many antichrists” (1Jn 2:18), a development that continues to this day.

Yet that radiant beginning also still has an effect in the next generation of Israel. The deeds done by the LORD are passed on to the next generation, even though this generation itself did not participate in the conquest of the land. It is important to notice the Lord’s actions in the lives of the elderly and to see from them how He works. This will help us to see God’s actions in our own lives. We remain in connection with Him and thereby build up our own relationship with Him.

Verses 8-10 | The Decay Becomes Visible

8 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. 9 And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. 10 All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

Decay in Israel begins when Joshua and the elders have died, although signs of decay are already visible in their days. That is also how it went with the church. In the days of the apostles, decay is still being held back, but soon after that it becomes more and more visible. Paul and Peter have warned that after their passing away the evil consequences of unfaithfulness and rebellion will become manifest in the church (Acts 20:29-30; 2Pet

1:12-14; 2:1-3). Mixing with unbelievers is the means by which evil can develop in the midst of the church and later overwhelm it, as was the case with Israel.

If we compare the name that the people here give to the burial place of Joshua with the name that his burial place in Joshua 24 has (Jos 24:30), it turns out that the first impressions of the blessing are fading. The name change shows that other things have become more important than the blessing of the land. This shows the germ of decay.

The meaning of Timnath-heres is 'a part of earth'. In Joshua 24 this place is called Timnath-serah, which is 'an abundant part' (Jos 24:30). Thus our appreciation for our abundant, heavenly part can become no more than a piece of earth. The earthly things are sought and the heavenly inheritance is considered small. This shift in interest will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

After Joshua and the elders after him died, the good influence ceases. By their personal faithfulness and faith they have had an influence on the people. Inasmuch as that influence has vanished, a generation is emerging who appears to serve the LORD only outwardly. The people of this generation do not have a bond with Him themselves. Their ancestors have fought for the land. They have told their children of the work that the LORD has done. But it is too long ago for the grandchildren to become really enthusiastic about what God has given His people and what their grandparents have acquired under much struggle. They suffer from what has been called the disease of the third generation: the grandfather acquires, the son inherits, the grandson corrupts.

To truly enjoy the blessings God has given His people, we must be in a personal and living relationship with God. We can hear from our parents and grandparents about great things God has done, but if we don't have our own relationship with the Lord Jesus, those stories will ultimately have no meaning for us. Our interest is superficial and evaporates like a vapor.

We too will have to fight to take the blessings God has given us. It is not necessary that we corrupt the inheritance because our parents and/or grandparents have fought for it and that we don't fight for it or to a lesser extent. It is so, that every generation has to fight that battle again. There is a huge challenge ahead of us.

Verses 11-13 | Idolatry

11 Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, 12 and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from [among] the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. 13 So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

It is a remarkable phenomenon that, when man leaves God, he exchanges God for other gods. It is not the case that a man gives up God to continue his own way. Man must have an object of worship. Someone once said: "If there was no God, it would be necessary to find out or invent one." Man seems to have a religious instinct that demands a higher power or powers. Every human being has this 'instinct' within him, even the atheist who denies the existence of God. When you talk to such a person, it often turns out that he believes in himself, and thus that he is his own god.

The poignant thing in the book of Judges, however, is that it is a people who God has made to be His people and to which He has done so much good things. The cause is that they forget the LORD, the God of their fathers, Who led them out of the land of Egypt. For us it means that the door is open to evil when the personal knowledge of Christ and His work and the Word of God disappear into the background. Satan sees his chance and fills the resulting void with his means.

Two idols are mentioned by name, one male, Baal, and one female, Ashtaroth. Baal means 'man' or 'lord' with the thought of owner. Ashtaroth, the female idol, speaks of fertility in a natural sense. Both idols are perversely connected and show something of the mystery of lawlessness. Lawlessness means that there is no authority being acknowledged. It is doing one's own will, satisfying one's own lusts. This is the result when God and His Word disappear from the field of view.

Verses 14-15 | In the Hands of Enemies

14 The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around [them], so that they could no longer stand before their

enemies. 15 Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

God loves His people too much to let them go on the wrong way. The remedy He uses may seem strange, but it is effective. It says strongly: "He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them." If you are plundered, it means that you have nothing left. Everything has been taken away from you, you have lost it. We must always remember that it is about the people of God who live in the promised land and are allowed to enjoy everything God has given them. All these blessings are robbed from the people, they are lost because of their unfaithfulness and forsaking the LORD.

It's the same with us. If we become unfaithful and forsake the Lord, no longer taking Him into account, we will no longer be able to enjoy the heavenly blessings. Other things have become more important to us such as earning money, making a career, luxury holidays. It can all become so important to us that we are totally seized by it. It is going to dominate us in such a way that it will eventually predominate us.

It gives no peace to the soul, no real happiness to the heart. It is fake happiness that is a yoke. Only when we understand its slavery and notice that we have lost our heavenly blessings a change can take place. Until then, they have disappeared from our lives, robbed by the enemy. This enemy does not leave us alone, he is chasing us to more and higher happiness in the world.

God has allowed this, yes, He has even worked it. He has withdrawn from our lives to give the enemy a free hand so that he can do with us what he wants. He wants us that we start to long again for Him and what He gives. We can learn this from the way in which He deals with Israel here.

Verse 16 | The LORD Raises up Judges

16 Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.

Further on in this book we read a beautiful word about the feelings of God toward His people when He had to surrender them to their enemies

because of their unfaithfulness: “He could bear the misery of Israel no longer” (Jdg 10:16). What a God full of mercy and compassion! We read something like this in verse 18 of our chapter. He starts to work for the deliverance of His people and for that He uses people who serve Him and judge evil.

The name ‘judge’ says it already. A judge is someone who points the finger at evil and administers justice. He pronounces his judgment and verdict on it. The judge is not someone who only judges between people, but he is also on behalf of the people the leader in confessing guilt to God. By doing so he restores the bond between God and His people. He is the new connection between the LORD and His people.

For us, who live in the time of the church, a judge is not primarily a person, but a principle. This means that God wants to bring us to self-judgment if we have become a slave of desire again through our unfaithfulness. He wants us to judge the wrong thing in ourselves. He awakens in us the longing to deal with sin, which has once again become boss over us.

This is the same as with the enemy. This is not a literal enemy for us either, but a spiritual power that wants to assert itself again, as we have read before: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual [forces] of wickedness in the heavenly [places]” (Eph 6:12).

The fact that God gives judges speaks of a revival based on judgment. In other words, the self-judgment that a person comes to after a correct judgment of the true state of things. Self-judgment is to give the wrong thing in oneself the right place by judging it. This will enable the Lord to regain His proper place in life. The Lord is with this humble mind, this mind of self-judgment, and He delivers the person. The same goes for a local community of believers.

Verses 17-19 | A Downward Spiral

17 Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as [their fathers]. 18 When the LORD raised up judges

for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. 19 But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.

Reading these verses may give us a feeling of despondency and depression. Is this people's aberration then incurable? God wants to hold up a mirror to us with the recurring unfaithfulness of the people, for we are no better. For the people salvation lies in listening to the judge. As long as he lives, that is as long as he is in charge, it goes well. If he dies, which means, if evil is no longer judged, things go wrong.

For us this means that we can only go the way of the Lord and enjoy the blessing if we keep the flesh within us judged. Romans 6 tells us how we can live in self-judgment: "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11).

We have a powerful weapon in our hands, namely the Word of God. We read in it that we may see ourselves as dead in relation to sin. Sin no longer has a right to us because we have found our end in the death of Christ. "Our old self", which we are by nature, is "crucified with [Him]" as we read in the same Romans 6 (Rom 6:6). Living in that consciousness guarantees enjoying the blessing in fellowship with God. The secret of the judge in our life or in the life of a local community is that we look at the Lord Jesus and what He did on the cross.

The history of Israel teaches us that after the death of a judge, an increase in evil is found. As a result, also the deliverances become smaller and less complete. The characters of the deliverers also become less strong. This downward spiral finds its lowest point in Samson, the last judge mentioned in this book. He dies as a prisoner of the enemy he has to chase away and the people are still in captivity after his death.

Verses 20-21 | The Anger of the LORD

20 So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and

has not listened to My voice, 21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died,

If the people deviate from the LORD, it justifiably arouses his anger. That the anger of the LORD burns against Israel is also said in verse 14. God is not only sad, but He is also angry. He is holy and cannot bear sin in His people. The book of Leviticus regularly speaks of the holiness of God. He desires to see this holiness also among His people (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26). He cannot be connected with sin. Therefore, everything in Israel must be in accordance with His holy presence. What is infringing this must be removed from among the people.

God is not indifferent to sin in our lives. He wants us to remove everything in our lives which He cannot have fellowship with, which He cannot be involved in. To let something of sin exist in our lives or allow it again is unfaithfulness toward Him.

Israel violated the covenant God has made with their fathers. The fathers committed themselves to serve the LORD. They have said it, three times: "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" (Exo 19:8; 24:3,7), once before God gives the law and twice after that.

But they have transgressed His covenant again and again. They have not fulfilled their obligations. They have not listened to the voice of God. Therefore God could not continue to bless them and had to discipline them. The surrounding peoples who remained after Joshua's death will no longer be expelled before them by God. They shall be His rod of discipline.

If the Israelites leave the LORD to serve the idols, they will be surrendered by the LORD to serve the idolaters. These idolaters are a means in His hand to discipline His people, that they may return to Him.

Verses 22-23 | Tested

22 in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not." 23 So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

God does not leave the nations in the land only to discipline His people. The wonderful thing is that God also uses these peoples to test His people.

God can have several goals in mind in a particular act. One of the reasons for not completely eradicating the enemies is to check with His people whether they will follow the way of the LORD or not.

It is not difficult to be permanently in the Lord's way if everyone around us is also in the Lord's way. Then there is no danger that anyone will lead us astray. The situation becomes different when we live among people who do not take God into account. To keep our course straight before God requires a lot more effort. We have to go against the tide. Just then we can show that we seriously want to live according to God's Word and to His honor.

The same goes for our lives among people who say they are Christians, but fill in their being a Christian in their own way. How they justify their life-style can sometimes sound very plausible. Taking over their way of thinking will mean that the enemy has hit the target. It can be a trial of our faith if we discover what the Bible says about it. If we come to the conclusion that God's Word says something other than they do and we obey the Bible, we have defeated the enemy. This is to God's glory.

In local churches there are also situations where faith is put to the test and those who want to live according to God's Word become evident. We have an example in the church in Corinth. The believers do come together in one building, but do not form a real unity; there is division among them. There are many causes for division. Such situations sometimes are allowed by God to see who is faithful to Him and His Word. Those who are approved become evident in this way (1Cor 11:17-19).

Paul writes to Timothy about such a situation. He compares professing Christianity to a large house with all kinds of vessels. The vessels are of different materials and there is a distinction between vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. Everything is mixed up. God uses the mixing of the honorable vessels with the vessels to dishonor to reveal the former (2Tim 2:21). The vessels to honor are the faithful believers who separate themselves from evil and go the way God indicates in His Word.

Judges 3

Introduction

In Judges 3 we get acquainted with the first three judges and their performance. Of all three we read something that gives their person a lower appearance. Othniel is the son of Kenaz, a younger brother of Caleb, Ehud is left-handed and Shamgar uses an oxgoad in battle. In general, such men do not get the most votes in an election. It makes it clear that they are men of God's choice and not of the people, of man. This choice belongs to the ways God goes in broken situations, when the shine of the beginning has faded.

Just look at the origin of the church with its great apostles, and compare this with the later situation of decay. In the beginning, the Spirit can work mightily as an answer to the glorification of Christ. After the onset of decay, the instruments are also characterized by certain forms of weakness. Luther and Calvin, Darby and Kelly, all great men of God in their time, did not climb the height of men like Paul and Peter. Yet God wanted to use them for His purposes, in the reformation of the sixteenth century and in the revival of the nineteenth century. In this way God always wants, even today, to use weak, limited and insignificant people for the deliverance of His people.

Generally speaking, the reformation is the deliverance from the yoke of Rome, the ritualism; the reveille is the deliverance from the dead orthodoxy, the rationalism, in the Protestant churches. The deliverance needed today is the deliverance from the spirit of Laodicea, the spirit of complacency, the desire to have spiritual life without life from the Spirit. It's about the experience: what do I feel good about?

The things of God are judged according to our taste and feelings and not according to the Word of God. The fact that these enemies are particularly active today does not mean that the old enemies, ritualism and rationalism, have been defeated forever. These enemies will constantly try to get God's people back in their grip. This state of affairs means that we have to deal with these enemies over and over again and act as a judge.

Verses 1-2 | Be Taught War

1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them ([that is], all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; 2 only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly).

Verses 1-6 of this chapter belong to the previous chapter. They describe other reasons for which God has left the enemies in the land. God never does something without purpose. He has His own reasons for all His actions. Sometimes He even has multiple purposes in mind. He can work several things with one certain action or one certain word. The ultimate goal of God is to glorify Himself in the happiness and blessing of man in general and of His people in particular. The reason mentioned here is that God through the presence of the enemies wants to teach His people war.

When a man is prosperous, his life is going well and without hardship, it is not so clear what is present in his heart for God. Prosperity does not take away the unfaithfulness present in the heart. If everything goes well, there are no exercises and struggles to learn Who God is and how to use His power to overcome hardship. It is not God's purpose that we allow ourselves to be overcome by the enemy, by evil, but that we overcome evil in His power.

God knows what is in man, but through the enemies left behind man will discover this for himself. His reaction to evil shows what is in his heart. If there is a real connection with God, he will go to God when danger threatens.

What is created by unfaithfulness – the people have been unfaithful and have failed to eradicate all enemies – is used by God for good. The spared enemies serve to teach generations who did not participate in the conquest of Canaan to fight for the blessings God has bestowed. By the presence of the enemies they can show if they appreciate the land of God.

Whoever appreciates what God has given, will not allow the enemy to take possession or keep this gift of God. He will fight for it. What is thus taken from the power of the enemy will have an extra valuable meaning. In daily life this is also the case. After all, it adds value to our property if we have worked for it ourselves, isn't it? It is much more our property. We enjoy it more intense than things that have been fallen into our lap.

Times of decay are times of struggle for one who wants to be faithful to the Lord. In the second letter to Timothy, which describes the time of decay in professing Christianity, reference is made several times to fight (2Tim 2:3-4; 4:7). In these texts the individual is called upon to remain faithful in the midst of decay. Fight reveals winners (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21).

In all this, we must always remember that our struggle is in the heavenly places and is not a struggle against flesh and blood. The peoples who remained are a picture of the flesh within us. The flesh is not left within us so that we may serve it, but so that we may learn to judge it. These peoples can also be a picture of a “thorn in the flesh” as Paul had it (2Cor 12:7). The purpose of that thorn was not to paralyze him in his service to God, but to keep him humble and dependent.

In this way there can be things in our lives that we would like to get rid of, but that we still have to carry with us. These are not sins, for these we must condemn. It mostly is about unpleasant matters which, in our opinion, limit our functioning. But God has allowed these things to keep us humble so that we can function better for Him.

Verse 3 | The Enemies

3 *[These nations are]: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.*

The enemies mentioned by name are the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites. The area of the enemies is also described. Each enemy has its own field of activity. The Philistines are mentioned first. So we find it also in Joshua 13 (Jos 13:1-2). There the LORD says that there is still much land left to take possession of. When the land not conquered is listed, the area of the Philistines is mentioned first.

The Philistines occupy a special place among the enemies of Israel. They are the most persistent enemies. Only when David is king he will take away the strength from this enemy, but even then he is not completely eliminated. Even then he remains active, even if he is no longer the ruler over the people.

It is remarkable that not the Philistine people are mentioned here, but “five lords of the Philistines”. In Joshua 13 we read about the same five lords and the names of the places they reign are listed (Jos 13:3). Three of these places Judah has captured (Jdg 1:18). But here it turns out that they have not done this adequately.

The Philistines are a people who have nestled in the land and claim it for themselves. In Exodus 13 we read that God allows His people to leave Egypt and that He “did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near” (Exo 13:17). The shortest route to Canaan would have been via the land of the Philistines. Yet this is not the way God has shown His people. He has had a different way for them in mind, a way in which they have had experiences with Him and through which they have come to know Him and also themselves better.

The Philistines entered the land by another way. They are a picture of a people who do not know the salvation out of Egypt, although they are connected to it, because they originally come from Egypt. In Genesis 10 Mizraim is mentioned as an ancestor of the Philistines, and Mizraim is Egypt (Gen 10:13-14). This means that both Israel and the Philistines had to deal with Egypt.

The difference is that Israel has been there in slavery and redeemed by God, while the Philistines are a wandering people who have left Egypt but have never known salvation. They also know nothing of experiences with God in the wilderness and of a passage through the Jordan to get into the promised land.

The Philistines represent people who say they are Christians, who say they are entitled to the blessings of God, but who have no life from God. They have never sincerely confessed their sins before God and do not participate in salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus. They are nominal Christians. They are people who, in their so-called being Christians, are guided by their own thoughts and feelings.

Nominal Christians bend the Bible to their will. Serving God they do so in the way that seems best to them. Their religion is determined by the ‘five lords’. We can compare this with the five senses of man. In serving God, the nominal Christian is guided by what he hears, sees, smells, feels and

tastes, that is to say, purely by his own perception and not by the Spirit of God, for he does not possess Him.

This way of religion is common in professing Christianity. It is not what God says that determines, but what man thinks. When the opinion of nominal Christians becomes decisive in the things of God, the Philistines as it were are in charge, and the people of God are robbed of God's blessing and the enjoyment thereof.

About the second enemy mentioned here, the Canaanites, some things have been written about in the discussion of Judges 1:8-9. Further on, at verse 5 of this chapter, some more will be added.

The third enemy comes from Sidon. This is in the area of Asher (Jdg 1:31). Because of the unfaithfulness of Asher, this enemy is still alive and exercises his influence. Because of this, the Israelites began to serve the gods of Sidon (Jdg 10:6). The judgment prophecy about Sidon (Eze 28:21-24) shows that Sidon was for Israel a 'prickling brier or a painful thorn'. God blames this city for the inhabitants having enriched themselves with His silver and gold and for having traded His people as merchandise (Joel 3:4-6).

The enemy Sidon represents to us is the thirst for wealth. When greed reigns over the people of God, it becomes a plague that prevents them from enjoying God's blessings. The relationship between Sidon's greed for money and the pain that Sidon brings to the people of God in all times is aptly expressed in 1 Timothy 6. There we read: "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1Tim 6:10). Can it be said clearer?

The Hivites are discussed when we discuss verse 5.

Verse 4 | Obey the Commandments

4 They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses.

The previous chapter states that Israel is put to the test to see "whether they will keep the way of the LORD" (Jdg 2:22). Now we see another angle why the enemies remained in the land. The purpose here is "for testing

Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses". The presence of the enemies is therefore also a test of whether they will stick to the Word of God.

In short, it is about the way of the LORD (Jdg 2:22) and about the law of the LORD (Jdg 3:4; cf. Deu 8:2).

On the way we go, all kinds of things happen to which we react, consciously or unconsciously. Through our reaction we show whether we take into account God and His interests or whether we are concerned about ourselves and our own interests.

Verse 5 | Among the Nations

5 The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites;

The presence of the peoples in the midst of which Israel lives is caused by Israel's unfaithfulness in the past. But God will not stop there. He uses these peoples to test the faithfulness of His people. He hands them over to the results of their disobedience, but does so that they may ask for Him again.

Day after day they live among these nations. They are thereby put to the test whether they will remain faithful and obedient to the LORD and chase away these enemies anyway. Their presence is on the one hand a testimony of their unfaithfulness in the past, and on the other hand it is a challenge to drive out their enemies and take possession of what God has given them, or to restore what they have lost.

What do these enemies represent? They are a picture of spiritual powers that want to influence the behavior of God's people. What kind of influences these are, we can deduct from the meaning of their names. Every Christian or community of Christians is exposed to these influences. The big question is how we respond to it. Do we give in, let ourselves be influenced by these enemies, or are we going to attack them and defeat them with God's Word? This is the test for us in the spiritual sense as it is for Israel in the literal sense.

Canaanites

About the meaning of the name Canaan ('merchant') another application can be made that we might recognize. Sometimes, without knowing or wanting, we can easily be influenced by this enemy. This is not about a financial benefit. There is also social benefit to be gained. Something can give a certain status to someone.

Some great men on earth claim to be Christians. Anyone who wants to come to the flattery of such prominent guys will have to show himself a Christian and adopt Christian values. In this way, the Christian goods are turned into merchandise. It is not a question of whether someone is a real Christian or just in name. In many cases only God can answer that question. What matters is the way we act, the way we deal with the things of God.

I read an illustration of this in the newspaper. A list of the top six favorite preachers of U.S. President Bill Clinton (president from 20-01-1993 to 20-01-2001) was published. You wonder what's the value of that. If you're part of that, of course, it scores well, especially if you're number one for him. It puts the preacher's person in the spotlight and also his supporters. That makes a profit. If you are number 1 or 5 or 6 for Clinton, there will be many more who want to join you and your group. Many would much rather identify with a celebrated and influential person in the world than with a rejected and despised Christ in heaven. How God judges the value and profit of such a top six, we will leave to Him.

Hittites

Their name means 'sons of horror'. The influence they exert lies in the atmosphere of instilling fear. This enemy tries to strangle the mouths of Christians. His proven weapon is fear. Many Christians are afraid to open their mouths to testify of their Lord. This may be a word to unrepentant people, but it may also be a word to be heard among believers.

Why are so few believers preaching the gospel? Why do so few children of God in the church open their mouths to thank God or to pray? Fear grips the people of God. Afraid to lose your face. Afraid, because you are too busy with yourself. When the heart is full of the Lord Jesus, shyness and fear are overcome, for what the heart is full of the mouth speaks out (Mt

12:34b). The presence of this enemy is the challenge to occupy yourself with the Lord Jesus. Then you can beat him.

Amorites

They are the 'talkers', that is one of the meanings of their name. It is a very different enemy than the previous one that gaggles you. Someone can talk a lot, but without really saying anything. An easy talker uses a lot of words. Please note here it is about an enemy. It's about talking as a negative characteristic.

There are Christians who are afraid to testify of the Lord Jesus, but who can show up whole stories about Christian values. Just look at the 'Christian' politics. This enemy must be overcome by fellowship with the Lord. When the "mind of Christ" (1Cor 2:16) begins to govern the thought life, the "talkers" are defeated. Then the words get substance and they work out something in those who hear.

Perizzites

Perizzites means, among other things, 'rulers'. They represent a spiritual class above the common people. They are the people who can know, because after all, they have studied for it. It is not what they say, but what they are. A person who has not studied, has no title in his name, cannot speak with authority. In a community where this applies, the Perizzites are in charge.

The teaching of the Lord Jesus that He gives when He is on earth is not accepted, among other things, because He does not possess the papers that are judged necessary (Jn 7:15). That's still how it works today. A person who has not followed recognized religious education is ignored in large parts of professing Christianity, no matter how much he speaks God's truth. They just don't listen to him, because he's not a 'colleague'. This enemy is overcome by listening to what the Lord Jesus says in Luke 22 (Lk 22:25-27).

Hivites

The Hivites are the counterparts of the Perizzites. In contrast to the Perizzites, the 'rulers', we see in the Hivites the 'villagers'. This is the meaning of their name. They are the common people, the lay people. They are not

concerned about the interpretation of the Bible. They have their 'rulers' for that, who are paid by them. The convenience serves mankind, and if one pays for it, one can thereby reassure one's conscience. Many Christians like not having to take responsibility and refrain from any activity.

In 1 Corinthians 12 we meet both the Perizzites and the Hivites. There we hear someone say that he is "not [a part] of the body" (1Cor 12:15-16). It seems that a 'Hivite' is speaking here. Although it is about someone who is dissatisfied with the place he has in the body, it can be applied to this enemy. The result of laziness and dissatisfaction is the same: nothing happens.

Every child of God has its own unique place in the body (the church) and may, yes, even has to perform the function that goes with it. Its function is for the benefit of the whole body (the whole church).

We also listen to a 'Perizzite' (1Cor 12:21-22). He can do it and doesn't need the others. He is above it.

Both enemies are defeated by watching what God has wanted (1Cor 12:18,25). God wants this to be visible in the local church (1Cor 12:27) and therefore these enemies must be 'chased away'.

Jebusites

The Jebusites close the list. The meaning of their name, 'trampling ones', shows the end result of what we've noticed in the previous enemies. They trample all that is of God. They overrun it. They resemble the dogs and swine of Matthew 7 (Mt 7:6). The Lord Jesus warns His disciples there that they will not give them "the holy" and "your pearls", for they will trample it and tear them apart.

When we think of 'the holy' we can think of the Lord's Supper. This is not for those who are not converted, but only for those who, through conversion to God and faith in the Lord Jesus, belong to the church. Unbelievers understand nothing of its meaning. They do not believe in the work of redemption of the Lord Jesus. All they can do with the Lord's Supper is trample it under their feet.

When we think of 'your pearls' we can think of the precious truths that the Bible contains about the church and about so many blessings of the believer. All these truths are not for unbelievers, but for believers. Unauthorized

people cannot appreciate these precious truths. They ridicule and mock them. That is why we should not discuss this with them.

This enemy can be conquered by ensuring that no unbeliever is accepted at the Lord's Table. We must not allow someone who does not have life from God to participate in the service in the church. This can be done by maintaining discipline in the church, as Scripture indicates, among other things, in 1Corinthians 5 (1Cor 5:1-13). This can also be done by keeping to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6-7 and in 2 Timothy 2 (2Cor 6:14-18; 2Cor 7:1; 2Tim 2:16-22).

Verse 6 | Marriage and Worship

6 and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

The enemy knows how to subdue the Israelites. The best way to do that is through love. He argues as follows: 'Let our girls marry men from Israel and the girls from Israel marry our men. After a while, the Israelites will take over our habits. After all, they will even start worshipping our gods.'

This way has always proved to be successful. If the enemy is not dealt with in obedience to God's Word, a love affair will arise with the world that means the demise of God's people. It is impossible to be neutral with the enemy. The enemy never admits to be defeated and will take advantage of every occasion to submit God's people to himself.

The same goes for us. If we feel at home in the company of the world, we will commit ourselves to it, while Christians are a people who, just like Israel, must live alone, separated from the world (Num 23:9b; cf. Jn 17:16). The next and final step is to serve the gods of the world. We see that the order is: first eat and drink together, then marry or connect and finally worship together.

In Numbers 25 and 1 Corinthians 10 there are several negative histories which also have to do with eating and drinking and which show the same result (Num 25:1-3; 1Cor 10:7-8). Eating and drinking in these cases are not neutral things. They are used by the enemy to make contacts. These contacts gradually lead to closer ties, until the closest tie, that of the marriage, is established. A next, inevitable step is to serve the gods of the spouse.

Verse 7 | Evil in the Sight of the LORD

7 The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

Seven times we read in this book that “the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (Jdg 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). These words herald every time again a new period of decay. Forgetting the LORD their God and serving the idols are the two aspects of evil, both of which become visible here. The second evil results from the first. It can’t be any other way. He who forgets God no longer keeps His commandments and no longer listens to Him. A void is created.

If there is no place for God, there is place for an idol. He will fill the void that has arisen with all kinds of other things to which someone will devote his attention, time and energy. This other thing becomes an idol than. In the explanation of Judges 2:13 Baal has already been mentioned. The “Asheroth” or “sacred poles”, as it also can be translated, are possibly a kind of fence around the idol, to protect it (cf. Jdg 6:25).

Verse 8 | Cushan-rishathaim

8 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

“Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.” God is deeply grieved by the actions of His people. He cannot stand idly by. Out of deep indignation, God is now going to act with His people in a way that does not exactly fit the wrong impressions we can have of a loving God. God is not the generous Father of Whom we sometimes think He condones sin. As if He would compare the actions of His people with bad guys tricks, which you should not judge too seriously. No, God takes the deeds of His people very seriously. He must discipline them for this.

However, God never acts from a feeling of irritation, as we can. If God must discipline His people, He does so with a view to their restoration. He wants them to repent and confess, so that He can bring them back to Himself and bless them again. Therefore they are surrendered by Him in the hand of the enemy. God says, as it were, to His people: ‘You want to serve

the world? Well, then you will know what the world is like.' Whoever as a believer wants the world will have the world, but as a master.

Mesopotamia means 'land of the two rivers' and is a picture of the world. Entertainment and pleasure on the one hand and religion on the other are the two rivers that make the world a pleasant abode for man without God. That Mesopotamia is a picture of the world can be deduced from Genesis 12 and Acts 7 (Gen 12:1; Acts 7:2). It is an area where the idols are served. From this region Abraham is called to become the ancestor of Israel (Jos 24:2).

Every believer is called by God to give up the world in the same way as Abraham did. Nowhere in the Bible do we read a call to stay in the world and to improve it (cf. Gal 1:4). The believer is "not of the world" (Jn 17:16). Of course, he has a task there, as the Lord has had a task there, as He clearly says (Jn 20:21b), but the world no longer has a right to us.

The king of Mesopotamia is called Cushan-rishathaim. His name means 'blackness (or: darkness) of double evil. This speaks of the darkness in which the world is shrouded. The world shuts itself off from the light of God, even rejecting the light (Jn 1:5; 3:19). When the light shines, but it is still rejected, the greatest darkness arises.

Whoever professes to be a Christian, but turns his back on God and serves the idols, will lose all the light he once had. God will have to let such a man lose sight of Him, the Source of light, and of the Lord Jesus, the Light of the world (1Jn 1:5; Jn 8:12). To such a person applies: "If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Mt 6:23).

Only when this situation has lasted eight years the people call to God. The number eight speaks of a new beginning after a complete period of seven years. Only when someone is completely stuck and can't get out of it himself he will call to God and is willing to make a new start with God.

Verse 9 | Othniel

9 When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

From this situation, Israel can only be delivered by a man like Othniel. We have already met him in Judges 1 (Jdg 1:13-15). There he emerges as a

faithful man and an overcomer within his own circle. He is someone who has interest for the blessing of God. He lets himself be inspired to act in faith. The starting point of his life is the Word of God. After all, he has taken Debir, hasn't he (Jdg 1:12-13)? Debir means 'speaking of God'.

We have also seen in Judges 1 how important his relationship with Achsah is. His marriage to Achsah shows that he does not participate in the general sin of Israel mentioned in verses 5-6 of this chapter. He did not take a wife from the nations, but one from the people of God. He abides by God's Word. To say it with a word from 1 Corinthians 7, he marries "in the Lord" (1Cor 7:39). Because he is personally free from the sins of the people, God can use him. All these things make it clear how things stand in Othniel's personal life.

He who does not manage his affairs at home according to God's Word should not think that he can do anything for the benefit of the whole people. "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much" (Lk 16:10). The education at home, in the family, is still the best preparation for serving the Lord in the church.

As has already been mentioned, today we recognize the judges mainly in the overseers or elders in the church. It is written of an overseer that it must be someone "who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1Tim 3:4-5). These are the people who can help other believers today to escape the grip of the world that has caught them again. With their help these believers can enjoy God's triumphs again.

Verses 10-11 | The Enemy Defeated

10 The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. 11 Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

Othniel did not owe his victory to himself. Although he is a suitable instrument, he has no power in himself to defeat the enemy. This requires the power of the "Spirit of the LORD". Only the Holy Spirit can ensure that the wrong elements of the life of God's people are removed.

The first activity we read about is that Othniel judges Israel. Only then does he go to war. He is first concerned with the condition of God's people. He makes it clear where they are wrong. This must lead to self-judgment. Non-confessed sins weaken the people of God. There is no strength to fight. The first work of the Spirit is that He lets us discover in ourselves what is wrong, so that we can remove it from our lives. In this way we are freed and the Spirit can fill us.

Then what is referred to as the second can take place, that is to say, go out to war. The characteristic of the young men, that they have overcome evil (1Jn 2:14-17), becomes visible in Othniel. He possesses the power of God – his name means 'lion of God'. Also the Word of God abides in him – he has previously taken Kiriath-sefer and made it Debir (Jdg 1:11-13).

After his victory, the land has rest forty years. If the power of God reigns, there is a situation where the enemy has no chance to do his corruptive work. But after forty years, Othniel dies, that is, the power of God has disappeared. The result is quickly apparent.

Verse 12 | Moab and Eglon

12 Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

When Othniel has died, it does not take long or the Israelites do again what is evil in the sight of the LORD. It seems that they have learned nothing from the last time. Are they not a poignant example of who we are? It is significant that it says that the LORD strengthens the enemy. God's power is not with His disobedient people of Israel, but with the enemy Moab. Is Moab better than Israel? No, he is not, but God wants to use Moab as a rod of discipline to get His people to return to Him.

This enemy also represents something. What that is, we can deduct from his name and from his history. His name means 'from the father'. Who is his father? That's Lot (Gen 19:36-37). In Lot we see a man who loves the world. He looks at what he sees with his eyes. He is guided by the desires of the flesh, that is the old nature that every believer still has within. In Genesis 13 this is reflected in the choice he makes (Gen 13:8-11).

In Moab's history two characteristics become visible that arise from the desires of the flesh, namely laziness and pride (Jer 48:11,29; Isa 16:6). Moab represents the deeds (or: the works) of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21).

The man who rules Moab is called Eglon. Eglon means 'round' or 'circle'. We could say that with Moab (the flesh) everything takes place within the circle of own interest. 'I' is central, and there is no place for God in this circle. The previous enemy, Cushan-rishathaim, who is a picture of the world, is followed by an enemy who is a picture of the flesh. This enemy is now given power over God's people.

In the life of a deviated believer, this means that he will behave himself carnal, that he is looking for the satisfaction of his own desires. That never gives real satisfaction.

Verse 13 | Ammon and Amalek

13 And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees.

Moab seeks the help of Ammon and Amalek. Ammon has the same horrible origins as Moab (Gen 19:38). His name means 'independent' and shows the self-will of the flesh. Amalek is a descendant of Esau (Gen 36:12). His name means 'people of rulers'. It shows the assertiveness, the desires of the flesh to rule. "The city of the palm trees" is Jericho, the city that forms the entrance to the land and is captured by Israel (Jos 6:1,20). The enemy now takes possession of that city again and thereby has a strategic place in his hands.

If a believer is unfaithful, the flesh takes possession of important principles in his life. For example, when making important decisions he is not guided by the Spirit, but by the flesh. When flesh takes control in a local church, there is conflict and confusion.

In the Bible, the church in Corinth is an example of this. Paul must exhort them because they are carnal (1Cor 3:1). In this situation he cannot speak to them about the blessings that are part of the Christian. He must remind them again of the most elementary things of faith, "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1Cor 2:2).

Verse 14 | Period of Oppression

| 14 *The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.*

During the previous domination, it took eight years before Israel cries to the LORD (verses 8-9). Now eighteen years of domination are passing before the people reach that point. It seems that deviating again from the LORD makes the people more insensitive to the discipline that God sends. It is only after eighteen years that the awareness of becoming slaves begins to grow and they long for their freedom. That is the experience we too can have. The longer we forget God, the longer it takes for us to return to Him.

Verse 15 | Ehud

| 15 *But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab.*

Ehud is the man who God raises up to deliver His people. His name means 'the decisive', 'the strong'. He is the son of Gera, which means 'reflection'. He comes from the tribe of Benjamin, which means 'son of my right hand'. If we think about these names, we can observe the following characteristics in Ehud. He is from Benjamin, which shows that he is connected with a position of strength, because this is what the name Benjamin speaks of.

However, it is not enough just to know that we are in a particular position. It also means that we make that position our property. That is, we are reflecting about what it means to have been given that place. This is derived from the name Gera, 'reflection'. The result of this 'reflection' is that a powerful performance takes place.

Ehud is left-handed. Therefore he carries his sword on the right (verse 16). That's an unusual place, but for him it's the best. This way he can use his weapon in the way that suits him best. From this we can learn that we should use the Bible in the way that suits us and that we should not imitate others in its use. That doesn't work. Thus David has nothing to do with the armor and sword of Saul. He knows how to deal with sling and stone and therewith he kills the enemy (1Sam 17:38-39,49-50).

The literal translation of the word 'left-handed' is 'closed from his right hand'. Apparently he can't use his right hand. In the life of a believer,

something can go wrong, causing him to lose his grip on the things of God. For example, someone may know the blessings described in the letter to the Ephesians, but be so busy with the things of life on earth that he no longer has time and attention for those blessings. In that way ‘gifts are given to the flesh’, which we also see in Israel, which through the hand of Ehud brings tribute to Eglon. For us, this tribute may consist of letting pass by opportunities to learn more of God’s blessings. We never get those opportunities back. We live for ourselves. We are overwhelmed by earthly worries and do not think of “the things above” (Col 3:1).

Verse 16 | A Two-Edged Sword

16 Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak.

Here we see the basis for victory. This is achieved by Ehud making for himself a sword with “two edges”. With this he overcomes his personal handicap and becomes useful to God as a blessing for His people. In various places in the New Testament we can read that this two-edged sword is a picture of the Word of God (Heb 4:12; Eph 6:17; Rev 1:16; 2:12; 19:15). The Word of God is the weapon with which any enemy can be defeated. But we have to be able to handle it, that is to say we have to get to know the Word so that we can use it.

The Lord Jesus uses this ‘sword’ against the devil when He is tempted in the wilderness. He parries every attack of the opponent with “it is written” and then cites a verse from the book of Deuteronomy (Mt 4:4,7,10).

It is a two-edged sword, i.e. it cuts in two directions. For us, this means that we must apply the Word first to ourselves and only then to the opponent. This order Paul presents to Timothy when he says to him: “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching” (1Tim 4:16). We cannot defeat the adversary if we allow things in our lives that are contrary to the Bible. We must first listen to the Bible ourselves and remove what is contrary to it.

The sword is a cubit in length. It is a precisely measured size, not too big and not too small. We must not add anything to the Word, nor take anything away from it. We need the whole Word, not just our favorite parts. Nothing is unimportant. Nor should we add our ideas or traditions. A

cubit also speaks of something insignificant (Lk 12:25-26). The Word of God is shabby for people who trust and build on their own mind. But the simplest truths of the Word of God are capable of striking the flesh in all its corruption when used in real faith.

Ehud wears the sword under his clothes. Nobody sees it. This is reminiscent of the word of the Psalmist: "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You" (Psa 119:11). At the same time, the Word gives strength to his walk: he wears it "on his right thigh".

Verse 17 | A Very Fat Man

17 He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man.

Armed with his newly made sword, Ehud will bring the tribute to Eglon for the last time. Eglon is a very fat man. As said, this enemy is a picture of the flesh, where everything revolves around its own 'I'. That cannot but result in slothfulness. Everything is viewed from the idea of how 'I' can benefit from it. There is no thought of others. Egoism reigns supreme. 'I' is getting big and voluminous. There is nothing in the flesh that attracts the spiritually-minded believer.

Verses 18-19 | A Secret Message

18 It came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. 19 But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he said, "Keep silence." And all who attended him left him.

God has raised up Ehud as a deliverer (verse 15). After his personal preparation he is ready for his actual task. After he together with others has fulfilled the obligation, he sends the others away. The commission of God is addressed to him personally. He must fulfill it on his own, without any further attendees. He achieves his victory in secret, without any outward showing. The effect of his act of faith is public and benefits the whole people. Others, the people, will benefit from his deed.

Gilgal occupies an important place in his mission, from there he leaves. We have already met Gilgal before (Jdg 2:1). There we saw that it is the place

from which Israel has always left to conquer the land and to which the people have returned after a conquest. Ehud does the same (verses 19,26).

The circumcision of the people also took place at Gilgal (Jos 5:2-9). The spiritual meaning of this is the judgment of the sinful flesh. Circumcision teaches us that every battle to be fought can never be fought in our own strength, in the strength of our flesh. If we go, while being aware of the fact that there is no power in us, God can fill us with His power.

The stones of verse 19 are probably those which Joshua erected as a memorial on the river banks after the people passed through the Jordan (Jos 4:20). But here they are transformed into "idols". This also happened with statutes given by the Lord, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Bible states that both have to do with the death of the Lord Jesus. Because this meaning is abandoned in parts of professing Christianity, to the roman catholic church they have become sacraments with an idolatrous meaning. They have even become means by which, when one uses them, one thinks one receives eternal life.

Verses 20-23 | The Judgment on Eglon

20 Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." And he arose from his seat. 21 Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly. 22 The handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the refuse came out. 23 Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked [them].

Eglon is alone, in an environment that is completely adapted to his wishes. He sits there at ease, to satisfy all his desires. Here we see a striking picture of the selfishness of the flesh that wants everything for itself. There is only one answer to such an attitude and that is the message from God that Ehud speaks. This is how the judgment on Eglon is carried out (Heb 4:12; Rev 19:13-15). The flesh can only be killed in the presence of God.

That Eglon arises from his seat seems to indicate a certain respect for the Word of God, but it is only an outward form. There is nothing in his heart that is really open to this Word. Such people have always been there and

they are still there. However, that does not change the judgment that the Word pronounces on them. How they are by nature is obvious when the Word is applied in its full sharpness. That's how it goes with Eglon. The sword goes into his belly and "the refuse", that is his girth, comes out. The corruption that is in him comes out through the sword.

The corruption of the flesh is revealed by God's Word. Don't we get frightened of ourselves when suddenly disgusting thoughts come up in us? That is the only thing the flesh can produce. The flesh of an unbeliever and the flesh of a believer are exactly the same. The Word makes it public and passes judgment on it.

After Ehud applied it to himself (verses 16,19), he now applies it to the enemy of God's people. He does so radically, deeply. He does not deal with his enemy in a sugary and superficial way. Nor is he content with a partial or temporary victory, but he wants a complete victory. He leaves the sword in the belly, he doesn't pull it out. He also closes the room in which he killed Eglon.

As for him, he has done everything to completely eliminate this enemy of God's people so that he cannot reappear. The application is clear. If we have judged a certain effect of the flesh in ourselves or in others by the Word that has caused it to disappear, then we must not allow it to reappear.

Verses 24-25 | The Servants of Eglon

24 When he had gone out, his servants came and looked, and behold, the doors of the roof chamber were locked; and they said, "He is only relieving himself in the cool room." 25 They waited until they became anxious; but behold, he did not open the doors of the roof chamber. Therefore they took the key and opened them, and behold, their master had fallen to the floor dead.

The fact that the king of Moab is eliminated does not mean that the people of Moab are deprived of their strength. Eglon has servants and warriors (verse 29). The servants have a good explanation for the locked door. They think he went to the toilet. If you eat a lot, you often have to get rid of your excrement.

At some point it takes too long to them. They suspect that something has happened. They get a key and discover that their lord is dead. We don't

read how they react. The actions and deliberations of the servants fit perfectly with the behavior of their lord. They belong to him and possess his spirit. The flesh has many expressions, but all these different expressions breathe the same spirit. It is always about satisfying the flesh.

Verses 26-30 | The Victory of the People

26 Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. 27 It came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he [was] in front of them. 28 He said to them, "Pursue [them], for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands." So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross. 29 They struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped. 30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years.

After Ehud has won his victory, he calls on others to share his victory. He does not rest until the whole people have part in it. This is the true spirit of brotherly love. He is committed to others. He does not withdraw from the battle when he has done his part, but leads the army to finish the work.

How important it is to give others a good example. This is particularly true for an elder or overseer of whom we can see a picture in the judge. If the flesh has been radically dealt with by God's Word, an elder or overseer can say "follow me", and then show the believers the way to victory.

Any connection between Ehud and the enemy is broken. In our lives too, the world and the flesh must be dealt with openly and decisively. Only then will we have a lasting victory. The only crossing in the Jordan is occupied. The Israelites crossed the Jordan to enter the promised land. They could only cross the river at the place where the ark paved the way for the people. For us, the ark in the Jordan speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ through which we have gained a place in the heavenly places. This strategic point must be kept by the believers at all costs.

Eglon is very fat and so are many in his army. They are like him, for they are in his service and are fighting for the same cause. But they too must be

killed. All the remains of the world and the flesh, the ten thousand “robust and valiant men”, die on the banks of the Jordan, the place that speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ. Moab is humiliated, not destroyed. The flesh remains an enemy as long as we live, but we must keep it in death.

The victory of Ehud has given the land eighty years of rest. As long as the sword, that is the Word of God, is active, there is rest. Although the period of rest is twice as long as the previous period of rest, this period also comes to an end, as we will see in the next chapter.

Verse 31 | Shamgar

31 After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad; and he also saved Israel.

Only one verse is dedicated to a victory over the Philistines by a certain Shamgar. His name means ‘foreigner’ or ‘resident’. The name is not Jewish. This seems to indicate that Shamgar comes from the nations. He is the son of Anath, which means ‘answer’. His weapon, “an oxgoad”, also speaks of the Word, but then as the world looks at it. For the world, the Word is without any visible value.

Shamgar is apparently a farmer, a simple person, someone who may not even be able to pronounce words well (cf. 1Cor 1:26-29). Possibly he is uneducated (Acts 4:13). He has, to put it in today’s language, no knowledge of the source text and he has not had a high level of education.

The Philistine people are an enemy in the land. They populate a small strip of land on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. They claim the land for themselves and even seal it by attaching their name to it. In the word ‘Palestine’ the name ‘Philistines’ can be heard.

But Shamgar is taught by God. In this way he knows the distinction between a member of God’s people and an enemy of it, even though that enemy also speaks the same language as God’s people. He knows ‘his Bible’ and knows how to use it. Shamgar’s oxgoad never fails when he uses it for his oxen. He can trust its operation. He keeps his oxen on the path he wants them to take. From experience we know that we can trust in God’s Word. It never let us down.

The enemy cannot stand up to such a testimony. Like the unbeliever who mockingly said to a preacher that he could not believe that the Lord Jesus had changed water into wine. That preacher invited him to his house. There he would show him an even greater miracle: how beer had turned into household goods. He used to be a drunkard, but God's Word had healed him. Then he started spending his money in another way.

We can learn a number of things from this one verse and make applications:

1. Only in Judges 4 we do read that Ehud, the previous judge, died (Jdg 4:1). It seems that Shamgar was a contemporary of Ehud. After Ehud's victory, not after his death, Shamgar followed the same path of faith. He is a fellow deliverer. In this way we can achieve victories together, each on our territory, for the benefit of all the people.
2. As said, his name means 'stranger'. The awareness that our own home is heaven and that only there is rest there for the Christian, makes us fit to overcome the enemy.
3. Anath, which means 'answer', evokes the thought that Shamgar's performance is an answer to Israel's 'calling'.
4. This enemy is in the land, unlike Moab, the previous enemy, who comes from outside the land. Philistine means 'wanderer'. This resembles 'stranger'. The difference is that a wanderer does not have his own place of residence, while a stranger does.
5. The number six hundred also has something to tell us. Besides names, numbers in the Bible also have their meaning. The number six speaks of man created on the sixth day. Examples we have with the image of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3:1) and the number of the beast (Rev 13:18). Six lacks one to be seven; the latter represents completeness. Shamgar's victory is not a total victory.
6. The oxgoad is used to keep the oxen in the right track. It is a stick with sharp points. If an ox deviates, it is corrected with that stick. This is a beautiful picture of what God's Word does in our lives. We often learn to apply the Word in our lives because others tell us something from it. "The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of [these] collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by

one Shepherd" (Ecc 12:11). Such words let the pilgrim walk in the right direction instead of "to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14).

7. "He also saved Israel." We can emphasize the word 'also'. It indicates that he, like his predecessors Othniel and Ehud, has redeemed Israel from a precarious position. This has given them back their freedom.

Othniel is a soldier, Ehud a diplomat and Shamgar an oxherd. God has been able to use them all because they have made themselves available to Him out of love for His people.

Judges 4

Introduction

In this chapter God uses two women for the deliverance of His people. They are Deborah and Jael. He thereby shows that His power is accomplished in weakness (2Cor 12:9a). Women represent weakness (1Pet 3:7). This fact also indicates that at that moment there is no suitable man in Israel who can be used by God. If God has to use women for such services, it is to the shame of man.

At the same time, this history is a great encouragement for all women who fear God and want to be used by Him. They are taught here how God wants to use them as a blessing for His people.

Verse 1 | After the Death of Ehud

1 Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.

Again the truth is proved of what is said in Judges 2 (Jdg 2:19). The man who led the deliverance of the people has died. The good influence he had on the people has thus disappeared. If good leaders are lacking, the people become rudderless and give in to all kinds of evil. The eighty years of rest (Jdg 3:30) did not make the situation better, but worse. For the fourth time we read the expression that the Israelites “did evil in the sight of the LORD”.

Verse 2 | Jabin and Sisera

2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

The enemy now used by God is in the north of Israel. For twenty years, from 1257-1237 BC, the people were oppressed by this enemy. About 130 years earlier Joshua had to deal with the same enemy (Jos 11:10-11). Apparently this enemy was then completely destroyed. Here he appears to be alive again. An old enemy revives.

Therein lies an important lesson. Satan knows exactly how to revive old errors and evil, and he also knows how to use them to bring the people of God back into slavery. This is also true in our lives. We are dealing with a defeated enemy, but he is still alive and trying to subdue the people of God. He will only be definitively eliminated in the future. That's how it will be with the devil.

In the names mentioned in this verse, we can find out more about this enemy. The meaning of the names is always about his character, his way of working. The enemy can take many forms. Each time he adapts to the situation. Fortunately, God always has an adequate answer to all these methods. Jabin means 'insight', 'intellect', 'wisdom'. It is a wisdom that is contrary to God's, a wisdom that is not from above, but that is "earthly, natural, demonic" (Jam 3:15). It is the wisdom of the world which is made foolishness by God (1Cor 1:20).

It seems that the name Jabin is a kind of title that indicates a position, like 'pharaoh' in Egypt and 'Herod' in Israel and 'Abimelech' with the Philistines. It is not the same man as in Joshua 11, but another person with the same name. Hazor means 'enclosed', 'enclosed area'. Sisera means 'battle-order'.

In connection with the names, we can see this enemy as the wisdom of the world, the human intellect, which rules in its own closed area and which rejects and excludes what is of God. As soon as the reason of the human intellect is given free rein in the things of God, God is shut out of the equation. Usefulness reasoning assert itself while there is no longer asking what God says about a particular matter in the Bible. An example of this we have in the meeting together of believers, to which different people give different interpretations. Many things have been arranged there by people who are not to be found in Scripture.

Whoever does ask for God's standards will find 'Sisera' opposite him. They are people who act in 'order of battle' to silence the 'obstructors'. This is a recognizable situation in large parts of professing Christianity. We can read in 2 Corinthians 10 how Paul, that is to say the Holy Spirit, deals with enemies like "Jabin" and "Sisera", an example which can be imitated by us (2Cor 10:5).

Verse 3 | Crying to the LORD

3 The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.

After twenty years of oppression, the people recognize the need they find themselves in. The enemy has ruled with an iron hand (chariots). In Judges 1 we already talked about those iron chariots (Jdg 1:19). We have seen that, if there had been faith, these chariots would not have been a problem. Now it must take twenty years before they cry to the LORD to be delivered from the enemy, from the 'enclosure'. Fortunately, this moment comes. God already has His instrument ready.

Verse 4 | Deborah, the Prophetess

4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

Deborah is a prophetess. Her name means 'activity' or 'bee'. Another meaning stems from the connection that exists between the names Debir and Deborah. Both names have the meaning 'the word' in them. For the application of the name Deborah, I use this meaning. The fact that she is a prophetess fits in with this. A prophet or prophetess is someone who communicates God's thoughts, someone who speaks "utterances of God" (1Pet 4:11).

The Bible has a number of prophetesses: Miriam (Exo 15:20), Hulda (2Kgs 22:14), Anna (Lk 2:36) and the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9). These examples are just as many exhortations for women to let God use them.

There are only two limitations that God imposes on the service of women:

1. "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (1Tim 2:11-12).
2. "The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says" (1Cor 14:34).

The first text states that she may not teach and may not exercise authority over a man. She does not possess the gift of a teacher and is not allowed to

exercise authority. The second text speaks about her attitude in the church. There she must be quiet, which means that she cannot raise her voice in order to lead the church to do anything or to say anything to the church.

We will see that the attitude and the service of Deborah, as they appear in this chapter, are a helpful illustration of the teaching about the service and the attitude of the woman in the New Testament.

She is married to Lappidoth. His name means ‘burning torches’. That reminds to Acts 2, where the Holy Spirit is poured out. There we read about “tongues as of fire” (Acts 2:3).

Thus we see in the couple Deborah and Lappidoth the beautiful combination of the Word of God that is applied in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 5 | Deborah, the Judge

5 She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Deborah’s living and working environment are described in detail. She lives under a palm tree bearing her name. Thus she is, as it were, identified with the tree. The palm tree is a tree that was very widespread in ancient Israel and was appreciated for its size, providing shade, and for its fruits, the dates (cf. Joel 1:12). The palm tree can grow very old and bears fruit right up to the end. It has a slender, straight trunk and lush crown (cf. Song 7:7). This symbolizes growth, fertility, and victory. The righteous is compared with such a palm tree when it is said of him that he bears fruit in the house of the LORD until old age (Psa 92:12-14).

The thought of the LORD’s house is also expressed in the place where Deborah lives. She lives between Rama and Bethel. Rama means ‘exaltation’ or ‘height’ and Bethel means ‘house of God’. The combination of the palm tree and the names of the places tell us that Deborah is a righteous person, who bears fruit and lives at the height of God’s thoughts. She is also associated with the house of God on earth. This enables her to judge the situation in which Israel is. These conditions also apply to us to be used by God for the good of His people.

Deborah is a woman of faith who doesn’t leave the place given to her by God as a woman. She does not travel through the land, but the Israelites

come up to her. This shows that she exercises her task and gift in the area God has given her.

With other prophetesses we see the same thing. Josiah sends messengers to the prophetess Hulda to hear through her God's will (2Chr 34:21-28). The prophetess Anna is someone who "never left the temple" (Lk 2:37). In Acts 21 we read about the four daughters of Philip who were prophetesses (Acts 21:8-9). Yet God sends the prophet Agabus from Judaea to come there to bring a message to Paul and He does not use the daughters of Philip because that message must be communicated in a public meeting (Acts 21:10-12).

When we think about the gifts and the task of the woman, it is important to ask ourselves what God says about them in His Word. In today's world, women are increasingly encouraged to assert themselves and take the same place as men. She is not his inferior, is she? She doesn't have to let herself be shoved away, does she?

The background to these questions is the contemptuous treatment that the man has often given the woman. This treatment must be condemned. Yet all the abuse that has led to such an attitude does not take away anything from what God says about the position in which He has placed both the man and the woman. This abuse is not eliminated by women's emancipation efforts or the efforts of all kinds of feminist movements. This abuse only disappears when both the man and the woman start to abide by what the Bible tells each of them about their behavior. This not only gives good relationships, but it also becomes a source of blessing. Deborah keeps to it and every woman who does so is blessed. In so doing, she brings blessing to all the people of God.

Verses 6-7 | The Command of the LORD to Barak

6 Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. 7 I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many [troops] to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.'"

In accordance with what we have just seen, Deborah lets Barak come to her; she is not going to him. When she must speak to him a word from the LORD, the God of Israel, she does so in the place where she dwells. She lets herself be led by the Spirit of God and acts with His insight. This action of God through Deborah is not His usual action and is to the shame of man.

Barak means 'shining'. "God is light" (1Jn 1:5). Whoever shines the light of God will defeat the enemy. Barak must be summoned and encouraged to do so. He apparently forgot the meaning of his name, perhaps because of the long domination by the enemy.

The name of his father, Abinoam, means 'father of sweetness'. Barak seems to have grown up in a family where a lot of love and kindness are found. This is how God wants to raise His children. In such an atmosphere, people are formed He can use.

The region he comes from is Kedesh in Naphtali. Kedesh means 'sanctuary' and Naphtali means 'wrestler' or 'warrior'. This indicates that Barak knows the sanctuary and knows what it is to fight. He resembles Epaphras, of whom we read that he always combats earnestly for the Colossians in the prayers (Col 4:12, Darby Translation). When we pray, we enter God's sanctuary. Prayer is not an easy job, it is an exhausting activity. Barak developed in such an environment.

It seems that everything is present to become a deliverer, but that he lacks spiritual courage. How wonderful it is to see how Deborah brings him to activity – a previously mentioned meaning of her name. She made him part of her conviction that God will hand over the enemy to him. She has received this message from Him.

Barak has to go to Mount Tabor, that means 'mountain of the purpose'. Is this not a great encouragement? We have to go to the mountain, so up, where we can see how God thinks and does, what He has purposed. If we keep looking at the situation around us, we might just complain. But if we engage in the purpose of God, what is in His heart, we will be encouraged. God's plans and counsels cannot be affected by any enemy. Let us focus on this in particular, then we will see what strength this gives us to fight.

Being aware of God's purpose and thoughts is the best basis for the battle to overcome. How good it is to encourage each other with this. Deborah

says, as it were, to Barak what Paul says to Archippus: “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it” (Col 4:17). In this way sisters can encourage brothers. There is a great lack of such sisters.

Verses 8-10 | Deborah Also Goes With Barak

8 Then Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” 9 She said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. 10 Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him.

Despite the beautiful meaning of the names connected with Barak, he doesn’t dare to go to the enemy alone. He wants to go, but needs someone he knows who trusts in God. He finds such a person in Deborah. In this he looks a little like Lot who also appears to trust the faith of another, namely that of his uncle Abraham. Deborah agrees, but she says that because of this the honor of the enterprise will not be for him, but for a woman. God rewards trust in Him; if this is lacking, He cannot give His rewards.

This may be an incentive for us to carry out the task that He gives us to do, without relying on the support of others. This does not mean that we do not appreciate support, but it should not be the condition for us to do what we are told to do. Yet Barak is a man of faith. It is not without reason that he is mentioned as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11 (Heb 11:32). He believes in Deborah’s prophecy and with a small army he goes to fight with a powerful enemy.

Verse 11 | The Kenites

11 Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanan, which is near Kedesh.

Suddenly the Kenite Heber is mentioned, apparently without reason. In Judges 1 we already looked at the Kenites (Jdg 1:16). There we read that

they are among the people of God, without being part of them. In their attitude they form a contrast with people like Caleb and Achsah. Here we have to deal with a man who belongs to the Kenites, but has separated himself from this people. He has gone his own way, but without connecting himself with the people of God. In this respect, he does not deny his origin.

Why he is mentioned here is perhaps to show the contrast with Barak who does act out of faith and for the benefit of the people of God. Heber is even a friend of the enemy of the people (verse 17). Heber is also mentioned here because his wife Jael is the one who Deborah means in verse 9.

Verses 12-13 | The Enemy Becomes Active

12 Then they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. 13 Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who [were] with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon.

It is a recurring phenomenon that the enemy becomes active as soon as the people of God start to act in faith. The enemy will not act as long as the people of God are passive and have no intention of doing anything about the situation.

In the life of a believer this does not work otherwise. When a believer is completely absorbed in the things of the world, the devil will not care about him. However, as soon as a believer realizes that he is wrong and wants to break his connection with the world, the devil becomes very active. He will try everything to keep the believer in his power.

Verses 14-16 | The Enemy Defeated

14 Deborah said to Barak, "Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you." So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. 15 The LORD routed Sisera and all [his] chariots and all [his] army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from [his] chariot and fled away on foot. 16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.

Now that the battle is approaching, it is again Deborah who inspires Barak. Through her fellowship with God she knows His will. With this knowledge she encourages, incites to fight and points to the final victory. Whoever fights for God, in faith in Him, can count on 'gain'. Just as in verse 6-7 she here directs Barak's faith to the LORD. The guarantee for victory is not Barak's army, the ten thousand men who follow him. She points out that the LORD Himself goes out before him; Barak needs only to follow.

We see how Deborah doesn't openly mix herself into the battle. That fits her place as a woman. We also see how, through her firm confidence, her faith in the LORD, she lays the foundation for defeating the enemy. This is how great the influence of a God-fearing woman is. Let no one say that a woman is silenced if she abides by the limits that the Word of God places on her public action.

Then Barak proceeds to actually act. The LORD shows that He is on the side of Barak and sows confusion among the army of Sisera. God always does this. If we believe, this faith can count on God making our cause His. Again, as with Ehud, the enemy is defeated by "the edge of the sword". God gives us no other weapon in the battle against the enemy than His Word, of which the sword is a picture (Eph 6:17).

Verses 17-22 | Jael

17 Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for [there was] peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. 18 Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid." And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. 19 He said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. 20 He said to her, "Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there anyone here?' that you shall say, 'No.'" 21 But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. 22 And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man

whom you are seeking." And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple.

Women play a leading role in defeating this enemy. The second woman mentioned has the honor of killing the captain of the enemy army. Deborah has already, without mentioning her name, spoken about this woman in verse 9, to the shame of Barak who lacked faith. Now we read her name and we are witnesses of her performance.

Here too, there is much to be learned from the way in which God uses women. Unfortunately, there are only a few of these women to be found, just as few, incidentally, as the true men of faith who, in full dedication, submit themselves to the Lord to be used by Him.

The woman involved in the battle at this important moment is called Jael. She is the wife of Heber about whom we have already heard in verse 11. It seems that she has a completely different character than her husband. He lives in peace with the enemy of God's people. Jael does not participate in that. Just as before Rachab (Jos 2:4,6,15-16) she identifies herself with the people of God. Like later Abigail (1Sam 25:3) she is connected to a man who has no interest in the things of God.

In her heart is faith. She invites Sisera to hide in her tent. She takes care of him so well that he feels at ease. After he has impressed on her not to betray him, he falls into a deep sleep. Then Jaël sees her chance. With hammer and tent peg she puts an end to the activities of this cruel oppressor of God's people.

What can we learn from her? Her name means 'climber'. She represents someone who searches for "the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1-2). To be deployable in battle, we must engage with Christ as He is in heaven today. We need to make an effort. Climbing is not easy.

Her life on earth is in accordance with this. She lives in a tent. A tent is the symbol of being a stranger, of being on a journey and not having a home here on earth. The tent peg, the means by which she kills the enemy, shows that to defeat the enemy it is necessary for us to behave as true "aliens and strangers" (1Pet 2:11). We will never overcome if we unite ourselves with the world and forget to search for the things that are above.

The tent peg is used in combination with the hammer. The hammer is compared to the Word of God (Jer 23:29). The place where Sisera is struck is his temple, the side of his head. The tent pin is struck so hard that it remains stuck in the ground. We can say that the temple is the place where the thoughts of man are formed.

At the beginning of this chapter we saw that this enemy speaks of the intellect, the wisdom of the world that influences the people of God. This enemy can only be radically dealt with by a consistent life as a foreigner. In other words, we must not engage in the politics the world pursues. All kinds of 'sensible' reasons can be given to do this anyway. Therefore, we must always read and study the Word through which we will discover the things above, that is Christ. We will also notice that the Word, like a hammer, destroys all these 'sensible' reasoning.

It also is remarkable that Jael does not gain a public victory, but triumphs in her house, with the means she has. This applies to every God-fearing woman. Deborah and Jael take the place God has given them, humbly, but with certainty and faithfulness. Jaël knows from her daily experience how to use the tent peg and the hammer. Thus the wisdom of the wise is destroyed (1Cor 1:19).

Barak does not know yet that Sisera is dead and is still pursuing. Then Jael "came out to meet him". Exactly the same thing she did when Sisera came to her (verse 18). Then it was to be able to kill the enemy of God's people and thus help the deliverance of God's people. Now it is to make known the death of the enemy of God's people and let others share in the joy of deliverance. Deborah praises Jael in her song about the deliverance for what she has done (Jdg 5:24-27).

Barak again gets an order from a woman. Earlier Deborah said to him "Go" (verse 6) and "Arise" (verse 14). Now Jael says "Come" (verse 22). She invites Barak to come in and watch the man he is looking for. Barak sees Sisera, the defeated enemy and thus the fulfillment of what Deborah has said (verse 9). The tent peg is still in his temple, proof that he is really dead and does not play as if he were dead. Thus we may look at sin as a completely defeated enemy.

Verses 23-24 | The Enemy Subdued and Destroyed

23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel. 24 The hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan.

Ultimately it is God Himself Who kills the enemy. All honor belongs to Him. But He wants to engage His own to defeat the enemy. It is not enough for the Israelites – and it is not enough for us – to say that God must do everything. That is true, but they, and we, must make ourselves available. The land is God's land. He wants to take possession of it through His people.

This gives, besides a great responsibility, also a great blessing because God wants His people to share in what concerns His heart, what His longing is for. God wants to pull us up to His own level so that we can see how He sees and judges everything.

Living at that level and committing ourselves to it means the greatest happiness for our hearts. The more definitively we deal with the enemy, the more we will be able to enjoy the things God enjoys. In the history we have before us, Israel has done this. Let us also put an end to the enemy that is presented to us in this chapter and enjoy together with God the blessing of His heavenly land.

Judges 5

Introduction

The song that Barak and Deborah sing after victory is a special and impressive song. It is also a long song compared to the brief description of the battle. It is the only song in this book, there is no other singing. The content of the song suits the situation of those days. It expresses the experienced emotions and preserves the memory of God's actions.

But it is not just about looking at the past, what God has done and how the different persons and tribes have behaved. It is also a song in which faith sees the future final victory. It draws this certainty from what God has just done for His people. In the life of the believer, every victory he achieves is an advance on his final victory. In faith he can count on the promise: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20a). The final victory is sure. Every victory of faith refers to that moment and encourages the believer in his confidence in God.

In the first song we encounter in the Bible, the song of Moses (Exo 15:1), we see something similar. In it we read how Moses' faith looks over the whole wilderness journey, which then still lay before them, to the promised land (Exo 15:13,17). He sings about it and the whole people agree. The latter is not so in Deborah's song. We hear only two voices. It is beautiful to see how this song begins and ends with the LORD (verses 1-5; verse 31).

A subdivision of this song can help to better understand its content:

1. The LORD is praised for His intervention (verses 1-5).
2. What it looked like in Israel during the occupation (verses 6-8)
3. Call to testify of the victory of the LORD (verses 9-11).
4. The role of the single tribes (verses 12-18).
5. A description of the battle (verses 19-23).
6. Jael is praised for her deed (verses 24-27).
7. The mother of Sisera waits in vain (verses 28-30).
8. Perish and rise (verse 31).

Verses 1-5 | 1. The LORD Is Praised

1 *Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying,*
 2 *“That the leaders led in Israel,*
That the people volunteered,
Bless the LORD!
 3 *“Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers!*
I—to the LORD, I will sing,
I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel.
 4 *“LORD, when You went out from Seir,*
When You marched from the field of Edom,
The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped,
Even the clouds dripped water.
 5 *“The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD,*
This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.

(Verse 1) As said, this song is sung by only two people, a woman of faith and a man of faith, although the whole people share in victory. Yet it is a song to the heart of God. In times of decay, it is not about bringing together a mass of people to sing songs of praise. Today we may well ask ourselves whether the organization of so-called ‘praise meetings’, where everyone is invited, stems from the working of God’s Spirit. Singing can also become a goal in itself. There is nothing against singing together if there is reason to do so. However, if such meetings are held to bring about unity among Christians, then singing is used for a cause not supported by the Bible.

How does a song of praise come to originate? It is born in a heart that has gained an experience with God. God has revealed Himself in such a life in a special way. The result is a song of praise. The person who knows that his sins are forgiven, can sing about this. This is possible together with all those who also have the certainty of the forgiveness of their sins. There is a common reason to sing together. How could you sing together with unbelievers to the glory of God? After all, they have not had experiences with God, have they?

The reason for the song of Deborah and Barak is what God has done with Jabin. The previous chapter reads: “So God subdued on that day Jabin” (Jdg 4:23). In verse 1 of our chapter it says: “Then Deborah and Barak ...

sang on that day.” On the same day that God subdued Jabin, there is singing. There is no waiting for an official occasion. God’s actions in favor of His people apparently arouse a spontaneous reaction in the form of a song with Deborah and Barak. Thus, every form of deliverance is also for us a direct reason to sing a song of praise. We are even told that through the Lord Jesus we “offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name” (Heb 13:15). Do we do that?

(Verse 2) The translation of the first part of this verse does not seem to be simple. In an explanation of this verse someone who knows Hebrew writes: ‘The opening sentence is one of the darkest sentences of the song. It can also be translated: “When the hair-locks grew long in Israel.” This would be a reference to a practice of not having one’s hair cut to fulfill a vow (Num 6:5,18). This would mean a commitment to the LORD to participate in a holy war. Deuteronomy 32:42 may mean a reference to long-haired soldiers, although to translate ‘leaders’ is also possible (Deu 32:42)’.

Long hair represents devotion and submission. Of the woman it is said that long hair is “a glory to her. For her hair is given to her for a covering” (1Cor 11:15). In that section it is about her relationship with the man and how God sees it. The woman can show in her appearance that she has an inner mind of devotion and submission to the man. The woman can show in having long hair that she agrees with what God asks of her in her relationship with the man. She gives up her own will and takes a position of submission. This general thought about long hair also applies to texts in the Old Testament where long hair is spoken of.

If we look at the other translation, which talks about leaders, it seems to highlight a completely different aspect. Yet this is not the case. When leaders return to function again in the way they are expected to function and take on their responsibilities again, they can only function as true leaders if they commit themselves to God and are aware of their submission to Him. The result of this is that the people offer themselves voluntarily. No order is issued, but an example is set. Good example stimulates to follow the good example. If the relationships in the people of God will work like this again, this is a reason to praise the LORD.

Is it not beneficial for a community of faith to be led in a biblical way by leaders appointed not by men, but by God? It is about such persons that Paul says: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). Is it not the result of their actions that others voluntarily offer to do something for the Lord? Are we aware of this and what is our reaction?

(Verse 3) The faithfulness of the leaders and the willingness of the people awake in Deborah a song to the honor of the LORD. At the same time, this song is a testimony to other dignitaries. Kings and other rulers are called upon to listen to what she is going to sing. They can learn a lot from that. Rulers who want to take into account the will of God, are encouraged by Deborah in her song. However, those who do not take God's will into account will be given clear warnings in this same song.

If we consider that we, that is to say the believers of the church, are also called kings (1Pet 2:9; Rev 5:10a), then her song also has something to say to us. Let us open our ears and take in the content of this song.

(Verses 4-5) In these verses all attention goes to the LORD Himself and what He has done in the past. He is described here as a visible appearance. So God is also described in Psalm 68, where He is also sung as the Deliverer of His people (Psa 68:7-8). Deborah compares God's actions in favor of His people in the previous chapter with His actions at the beginning of Israel's history.

She sees Him going out with a majesty that paralyses the opponents. Great and impressive is the majesty of this Hero. Also Habakkuk gives a vivid description of God's actions for His people in the past (Hab 3:3-15). Much of God's action in the present is explained when we look at His action in earlier times.

Seir is a name for the mountains where the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, live. They treated the Israelites with hostility when the Israelites asked to pass through their land (Num 20:14-21; Deu 2:1-8). The Israelites were not allowed to wage war with Edom and had to go around their land.

In the song of Deborah we hear how God Himself goes ahead His people in majesty. Mountains in the Bible are often a picture of great earthly powers, but they falter against the greatness of God. They do not hold out for

Him. Sinai, the mountain where God has given the law to His people, undergoes the same impression (Heb 12:18-21). The fact that God has chosen Israel to be His people does not alter the fact that He remains an impressive appearance for them too.

Although as believers who belong to the church we do not stand in a covenant relationship with God and may call Him our Father, it is also written for us: "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). This need not frighten us, but it will increase our respect and awe for Him. At the same time it is an encouragement to know that this God is our God. He is going out before us in the battle against the enemy. Which enemy will be able to hold out?

Verses 6-8 | 2. Israel During the Occupation

6 *"In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath,
In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted,
And travelers went by roundabout ways.*

7 *"The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel,
Until I, Deborah, arose,
Until I arose, a mother in Israel.*

8 *"New gods were chosen;
Then war [was] in the gates.
Not a shield or a spear was seen
Among forty thousand in Israel.*

(Verse 6) We have already read a single verse about Shamgar (Jdg 3:31). Now we read something from him about the time in which he lived. His time resembles the time of Jael. These were times when the enemy attacked the people of Israel. Nobody dared to go on the highways anymore. The streets were empty. Whoever had to go somewhere, looked for roundabout ways, for winding roads.

God has predicted that the roads would become "deserted" if the people became unfaithful (Lev 26:22). When the Messiah reigns, it will be different, then the highways are populated again:

*"A highway will be there, a roadway,
And it will be called the Highway of Holiness.*

*The unclean will not travel on it,
But it [will] be for him who walks [that] way,
And fools will not wander [on it].
No lion will be there,
Nor will any vicious beast go up on it;
These will not be found there.
But the redeemed will walk [there],
And the ransomed of the LORD will return
And come with joyful shouting to Zion,
With everlasting joy upon their heads.
They will find gladness and joy,
And sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Isa 35:8-10).*

There, the people have returned to God and receive the promised, postponed blessing.

Our time resembles the days of Shamgar and Jael. The Word of God is taken no more into account. Unfortunately, the enemy succeeds in taking many Christians off the right highway and keeping them away of it.

Shamgar and Jael acted in faith and gave the enemy a serious blow. They have not resigned themselves to the general view that it did not help anything to resist. In all times, including ours, it has always become clear who is joining the general opinion and who is openly standing on God's side. The roundabout ways are a picture of acting according to one's own insights, while one does not ask for the will of God. Often this happens out of fear of the fight that certainly comes when one goes against the opinion of the mass.

(Verse 7) The people of God went their own ways. They decided for themselves how they would organize their lives and did not ask for God's will. There were no leaders, no people who made the people familiar with His will. Lack of knowledge of the Word of God, not asking God how He thinks about things, inevitably leads to the demise of the people of God (Hos 4:1,6). Then Deborah arises. Deborah is not arrogant when she calls herself "a mother in Israel". Further on a mother comes to speak, the mother of Sisera, but she is different from Deborah.

That Deborah calls herself "a mother" and not "a leader" says something about how to lead. A mother is someone who devotes herself with love

and care to her children. She does everything she can to give her children what they need to grow into adulthood and independence. There is a great need for such leaders in the church of God. Paul is a leader who behaves in the church in Thessalonika, a young church, as a mother, and also as a father (1Thes 2:7,11). The real leader is not someone who is served, but he who himself serves. A beautiful example of this is the Lord Jesus (Lk 22:24-27).

(Verse 8) The “gods” refer to rulers, people who lead the people. The gate is often the place where government is exercised in Israel (Rth 4:1-11).

The first part of this verse suggests an election. The result of such an election is another battle, not against an outside enemy, but against each other. The cause is that the will of God is not asked for. The new leaders are no better than the previous ones. They only work for their own profit. There is no peace and rest.

Is it different in the world today? And what do we see among the people of God? Many leaders think only of their own position, honor and income and have no real concern for the flock of God. Therefore, no weapons are given to the people with which they can defend themselves against the enemy (“shield”) or chase him away (“spear”). This resembles the time of Saul, when there is no blacksmith in Israel, so no swords can be made (1Sam 13:19).

The weapons we, believers of the church, use are not carnal, but spiritual. It is a sad fact that battle among the leaders of God’s people makes the whole people powerless. The people who are responsible for equipping God’s people withhold them the necessary guidance to lead a victorious life. The Word of God, which is like a shield and a spear, is no longer referred to, or its own, contemporary and meaningless explanation is given. In professing Christianity, “shield or spear” are hardly found anymore. Do we know how to handle God’s Word properly? If this is our wish, we will be taught by the Spirit of God.

Verses 9-11 | 3. The Call to Testify

9 *“My heart [goes out] to the commanders of Israel,
The volunteers among the people;
Bless the LORD!*

10 *"You who ride on white donkeys,
 You who sit on [rich] carpets,
 And you who travel on the road—sing!*
 11 *"At the sound of those who divide [flocks] among the watering places,
 There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD,
 The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel.
 Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates.*

Verse 9 continues with the encouraging theme of Verse 2. Oppression and battle have given way to victory. Deborah identifies herself with the people who have made themselves available to deliver God's people again. Her heart goes out to them. Do we also join believers who live a life of dedication to the Lord? Do we feel connected with them, are we happy with such believers? Deborah praises the LORD again for this because He has worked this. Let us continue to magnify His Name for everything in which we notice His actions.

(Verse 10) Travelers can travel on the road again without fear of danger. The daily activities can be picked up. These are the nice results of the deliverance from the power of the enemy. But Deborah does not only invite those who have fought. No, everyone can reap the fruits of the battle. Everyone is called to testify of what God has done for the benefit of His people and to think about it.

(Verse 11) She calls to share the righteous deeds communicated to us in Judges 4. She calls these deeds "the righteous deeds of the LORD, the righteous deeds of His leaders" ("for His peasantry" can also be translated as "of His leaders"). Very nicely here the actions of the LORD are seen through the actions of the leaders. They are called His leaders. With such people He likes to identify Himself. Their deeds are His deeds.

These righteous acts are a subject of discussion at the watering places. There the women come to draw water to give something to drink to all those who are thirsty. Here again water is a picture of the Word of God (Eph 5:26). Watering places offer opportunities to gather to draw from the Word. These are not places where people fight, but where everyone can quench his spiritual thirst.

We can often make these occasions ourselves. A visit or a birthday can sometimes be such an occasion. It is not about in-depth discussions, but about being impressed by the righteous deeds the Lord Himself or through His servants has done. Sharing together in what the Lord has done makes you happy and encourages (Acts 15:3-4,12).

The result is that the people can go to the gates because there is being properly judged again, contrary to what is mentioned in verse 8. Speaking together about the Word of God is one of the most important conditions for good governance (the gate) in the local church.

It says that “the people of the LORD” went down to the gates. This seems to indicate that the relationship between the LORD and His people has been restored. They have always been His people, but have not behaved like that. Now they are worthy of that name again. The people show that they are again connected with the LORD, because they are willing to listen to the people He has given in “the gates” to make His will known. A true relationship with the Lord is evident in our love for Him, and that love is always expressed in the desire to consult His Word and to do what He says in it.

Verses 12-18 | 4. The Role of the Individual Tribes

12 “Awake, awake, Deborah;

Awake, awake, sing a song!

Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

13 “Then survivors came down to the nobles;

The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors.

14 “From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek [came down],

Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples;

From Machir commanders came down,

And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office.

15 “And the princes of Issachar [were] with Deborah;

As [was] Issachar, so [was] Barak;

Into the valley they rushed at his heels;

Among the divisions of Reuben

[There were] great resolves of heart.

16 *"Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,*

To hear the piping for the flocks?

Among the divisions of Reuben

[There were] great searchings of heart.

17 *"Gilead remained across the Jordan;*

And why did Dan stay in ships?

Asher sat at the seashore,

And remained by its landings.

18 *"Zebulun [was] a people who despised their lives [even] to death,*

And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.

(Verse 12) It is possible that in the life of Deborah there was also a period of lukewarmness, that the condition of God's people did not concern her that much. She has come to the awareness that things have to be different in her life. She has called herself to sing a song. It may be that a war song is meant here, to indicate that she is again combative. Only after she has spoken to herself and acknowledged that she had to wake up first, she addresses Barak.

Sometimes we have to wake ourselves up and speak to ourselves to realize that we are not doing well. It is possible that we have been snoozed by all the pleasant things of life. Then there is no spiritual activity anymore, we are busy with our social and material interests. We're in the meetings, but we're not really involved. We read in the Bible, but it doesn't really touch us. Then we should not continue to snooze, but it is time to wake up and open our eyes to the things that are really important.

If someone is in such a phase, let him speak to himself and do it differently, motivated by God's love for Him and His people. Then he will again be engaged and can awaken others to become active and fight, like Deborah does with Barak. She urges him to arise and take away his captives. What is sung here to Barak is also attributed to the LORD (Psa 68:18) and to Christ (Eph 4:8). Barak is here a picture of Christ.

(Verse 13) The expression "the survivors" indicates that the period of oppression took its toll. Many have fallen in battle. What remains is not a great number of people. "The survivors" are also "the people of the LORD". All the people of the LORD are men who have escaped the enemy. The whole

people that are still there, a remnant, are in their existence a testimony of God's grace. For all have sinned and departed from Him, didn't they? The fact that there are still people left is only due to His grace.

The same will apply to Israel in the future. For their sins they will come in a great tribulation. The Lord Jesus says: "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved" (Mt 24:22). But even then a remnant will be saved and that will be "all Israel", which "will be saved" (Rom 11:26).

(Verse 14) Ephraim and Benjamin, the two tribes living in the south, are mentioned first. Machir belongs to the half tribe of Manasseh which lives in the land (Jos 13:30-31). Zebulun is also mentioned in verse 18 and praised for his courage. Together with Naphtali, Zebulun responded to Barak's call in Judges 4 (Jdg 4:10), perhaps because of their connection with Deborah.

Ephraim has set a good example. They come from the area of the Amalekites who are a picture of the flesh. In Ephraim we see people here who do not give in to the lusts of the flesh, but want to work for the interests of God and His people. The good example stimulates to follow good: Benjamin followed Ephraim to fight with him.

From Machir, Manasseh, the commanders have joined the fighters. They felt it was their responsibility. "Those who wield the staff of office" from Zebulun are especially mentioned. These are the officers who note the names of volunteers. They are recruiters. These people do their best to involve others in the battle. They don't think they can do it alone. We can learn from this that we need each other in battle.

(Verse 15a) Issachar is also a tribe that has dedicated itself to the battle. Both the name of Deborah and Barak are linked to this tribe in this verse. The princes of Issachar shared the conviction of Deborah. They were "with Deborah". As to Barak, this tribe had a stimulating effect: "As Issachar, so Barak." We are allowed to sustain people who have a good view of what God's Word says and we will be an incentive for others.

(Verses 15b-16) After praising some tribes who have worked for the interests of God's people, Deborah talks about some other tribes who have failed. What she says about it is instructive for us. Reuben did think about giving his time and powers to the battle. Yet it did not become practice.

What was the hindrance? Reuben has a lot of cattle. The herds of Reuben have also prevented him from taking possession of his part of the land (Num 32:1). He was satisfied with the wilderness side of the Jordan. Now he has been appealed to join his brothers and fight the enemy with them. He has thought and considered – that is said of him twice! – and he hasn't done it. He has come to the conclusion that his own affairs are more important than those of God.

We also can have our considerations about participating in the fight for God's people against the enemy. Again and again such opportunities arise. You will be asked to participate in tract distribution, street evangelism, or other spiritual activities. It takes time and effort. Every time something like this comes to us, it is a decisive moment in which it will become clear how we set our priorities. Are we seeking after our own interests or those of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:21)? There are Christians who really want to serve the Lord. They are full of good intentions and even sometimes have good ideas, but at the decisive moment they quit. The things of life, their own interests, are the deciding factors. This is Reuben.

(Verse 17) Gilead loved his rest. Imagine getting tired! Nice in your easy chair, your favorite program before your eyes that you wouldn't want to miss for any saved sinner or restored brother.

The tribe of Dan was too busy doing business. They had a large company with international contacts. The business and profit were more important than the fight for the brothers and the inheritance of the LORD.

Asher did not do anything at all. He hung around in idleness, lying on the beach baking in the sun and was not worried about anything. If he had been there long enough, you could find him behind a drink on the terrace to have fun watching the people passing by.

(Verse 18) What a contrast Zebulun and Naphtali form with the aforementioned tribes! They are the true victors who overcome by not loving their lives, but by denying it even until death (cf. Rev 12:11; Lk 14:26). They love God more than themselves, and they prove it by putting their lives at risk.

We too can do this when we see how God loved us. This love is clearly visible in what the Lord Jesus did on the cross. If we see this, can anything

else be expected of us? “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1Jn 3:16).

Paul is such a person who responds to God’s love with a life in which he gives up himself to serve others. In Acts 20 he bears witness to this: “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). He says of another servant that “he came close to death for the work of Christ” (Phil 2:30). Where can such men and women be found today? Do we want to be one of them?

Verses 19-23 | 5. Description of the Battle

19 *“The kings came [and] fought;
Then fought the kings of Canaan
At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo;
They took no plunder in silver.
20 “The stars fought from heaven,
From their courses they fought against Sisera.
21 “The torrent of Kishon swept them away,
The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.
O my soul, march on with strength.
22 “Then the horses’ hoofs beat
From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds.
23 ‘Curse Meroz,’ said the angel of the LORD,
‘Utterly curse its inhabitants;
Because they did not come to the help of the LORD,
To the help of the LORD against the warriors.’*

(Verse 19) In this vivid report we see how the kings of Canaan in great self-assurance went up to deal with the rebellious people of Israel. They had thought they would achieve a great victory, with a lot of booty. But with irony in her voice Deborah says: “They took no plunder in silver.”

The battle took place at Taanach near the waters of Megiddo, which is in the border areas of Issachar and Manasseh. Many interpreters point to the connection between Megiddo in the Old Testament and “Har-Magedon”

in Revelation 16 (Rev 16:16). Har-Magedon probably means ‘mountain of Megiddo’.

The relationship between the names is not the only thing that stands out. What is even more important is the similarity between the events of Judges 4 and what is written in the book of Revelation. With Megiddo the enemy armies are defeated and the people of the LORD are delivered. At Har-Magedon something similar will take place (Rev 19:11-21). The armies of the then restored Roman Empire, that is the united Western Europe that in the future will come to the aid of apostate Israel in its fight against the king of the north, will be destroyed by the coming of Christ. The God-fearing part of Israel is then saved and is called “all Israel” (Rom 11:26).

(Verses 20-22) The suggestion is made that this is an allusion to a cloud-burst, which turned the battlefield into a mud pool and the jammed battle cars could not do anything anymore. This enabled the Israelites to gain the victory. This would explain why Sisera did not flee in his car, but on foot (Jdg 4:15). The wheels got stuck in the mud and the horses sank into it. This also explains why the torrent Kison could turn into a wild flowing mass of water.

However, it is also possible that God did something that He did earlier in the plagues He brought over Egypt. With the seventh plague we read: “And the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation” (Exo 9:23-24). We can imagine that with such natural violence it can look like the stars are falling from the sky and that hail makes the ground swampy and the torrent wild.

This spectacle is an encouragement for everyone who takes part in the battle. They say to themselves, as it also can be translated: “O my soul, trample on the strong ones.” When we see God interfering in the battle, it gives strength and courage. The expression “trample” or “march” is also translated as “tread upon their high places” (Deu 33:29) as proof of the submission of the enemy. In Judges 20 it is translated as “trode them down” (Jdg 20:43). The “trampling” means breaking the enemy’s power and gaining victory.

This language is also characteristic of someone who stands in the victory of Christ. Such a person is not satisfied with half the result, but continues, until the full victory is achieved in the certainty of also achieving it. No matter how the horses' hoofs of enemy armies beat from the dashing, the enemy will be defeated in pursuit by the brave warriors of God's people.

(Verse 23) It is not known where Meroz is or has been located. It is probably a city in the middle of the area where the battle took place. This can be inferred from the heavy curse that is pronounced about Meroz. Other tribes have also been accused of not taking part in the fight, but not that serious. It may be that this distinction originates from the location of the areas. Anyone who is closer to a conflict area and sees what is happening with their own eyes has a greater responsibility than anyone who is further away and is less directly involved in the events.

A possible meaning of the name Meroz is 'built of cedars'. This indicates something of the things they lived for. They lived in cedar palaces and lived in peace, without worrying about the condition of their brothers. They loved themselves and not the LORD. Paul says of people who do not love the Lord: "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed" (1Cor 16:22).

What Deborah says of Meroz reminds us of what the LORD says through the mouth of Haggai. He reproaches His people that they are all busy for their own house, while they are not concerned about God's house (Hag 1:2-4,9). They lived for here and now.

Deborah is the mouth of the Angel of the LORD when she curses Meroz. This indifference to their brothers is seen as a renunciation of the help of the LORD in His fight against the enemy. Here we see how the LORD identifies Himself with His suffering people.

Verses 24-27 | 6. Jael Is Praised

24 *"Most blessed of women is Jael,
The wife of Heber the Kenite;
Most blessed is she of women in the tent.*
25 *"He asked for water [and] she gave him milk;
In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds.*

26 *"She reached out her hand for the tent peg,
 And her right hand for the workmen's hammer.
 Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head;
 And she shattered and pierced his temple.*
 27 *"Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay;
 Between her feet he bowed, he fell;
 Where he bowed, there he fell dead.*

(Verse 24) What Jael did, forms a great contrast with the attitude of Meroz in the previous verse. By juxtaposing things, the actions of the person concerned become all the clearer. We have already seen in Judges 4 what Jael's share in the battle was (Jdg 4:17-22). Here she is praised for what she has done. She towers above all the women of Israel. Her connection with Heber did not make her neutral and did not prevent her from performing her act of faith.

She is a simple housewife, like so many others, but she has distinguished herself by the courage she has shown. Once again: this is a great encouragement for every housewife. She can achieve great and decisive victories for the Lord in her own territory.

(Verse 25) Deborah describes how Jael acted. She acted with caution and used the means at her disposal. She put the enemy at ease. Although Sisera arrived exhausted, it was not the right moment to kill him. She recognized that. It is important to wait for the right moment to defeat the enemy. If she had acted too early, much more energy would have been needed. We may ask whether the intended result would indeed have been achieved. This exercise is necessary for all of us.

Jael doesn't panic when the mighty enemy enters her tent. She meets his request and even gives him more than he asked. She even adapts the drinking utensils to her distinguished guest and gets him to drink out of "a magnificent bowl". Jael's entire behavior must have made Sisera feel he was on a safe ground. Exhausted he falls asleep. This is the moment she has waited for and without hesitation she deals with this enemy.

(Verses 26-27) Deborah impressively sings of the actions Jael did to kill the feared enemy. She describes it vividly, as if you are present. Something has already been said in the previous chapter about the significance of the re-

sources she has used. Some details are added at this point. These are important because the Spirit mentions them. He wants to draw our attention to it.

Here it says that she used her “right hand” and that she took “the workmen’s hammer”. The right hand represents power. The hammer is a picture of the Word of God (Jer 23:29), but the addition “workmen’s” shows that the Word must be put into practice. It also shows that you have to be simple to use it and that you do not have to belong to the ‘highly-skilled’.

What Jael does with the hammer is sung here in different words. She struck, smashed, shattered and pierced, different words for the same act. This indicates the mighty working of the Word.

The result is presented to us in the same visual way. The power of this enemy is completely broken and he is eliminated forever. He bowed, fell, and lay overpowered at the feet of a woman. Nothing remains of his former greatness and power. It is a picture of what will eventually happen to all opponents of God. We can take the faith of Jael as an example.

Verses 28-30 | 7. The Mother of Sisera Waits in Vain

28 *“Out of the window she looked and lamented,
The mother of Sisera through the lattice,
‘Why does his chariot delay in coming?
Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?’*
29 *“Her wise princesses would answer her,
Indeed she repeats her words to herself,*
30 *‘Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil?
A maiden, two maidens for every warrior;
To Sisera a spoil of dyed work,
A spoil of dyed work embroidered,
Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?’*

(Verse 28) From Jael’s simple tent, our eyes are now turned to the luxurious house of Sisera. There lives a woman, a mother, but a completely different type than Jael and Deborah. Her despair is expressed in a striking way. Her son didn’t come home and she wasn’t used to that. Usually he soon came back from a fight and had the proofs of his victory with him. That he stayed away for so long could mean that he was defeated.

The mother of Sisera seemed to be free, unbound, but she was not. She sat behind "the lattice" through which she looked at the world. This speaks of the 'spiritual' lattice of her thinking. She had no real freedom. So it is with all the enemies of God. They don't think they have anything to do with anyone, while they are concerned about security measures on all sides.

The lattice, which must serve as protection, is proof of her imprisonment. She also doesn't dare to go and meet him. She stays in her fort, because that's what it is, no matter how luxuriously furnished it is. Fear reigns where people rely on their own thinking or on people or on things instead of God.

(Verses 29-30) Sisera's mother's questions are answered by smart ladies. Their answers are those that correspond to her own views. It are answers that should soothe the conscience: 'You don't have to be afraid, it will all be all right. It's because of the big spoils they carry along. That slows down the return trip.'

It was customary for the soldiers to take beautiful girls home as trophies. The word for "girl" actually means "lap" or "womb", which indicates that these girls had to serve to satisfy the lusts of the soldiers. The spoils of war also included beautiful and expensive clothing. The colored clothes were for Sisera, the colorful embroidery for his mother and the noblewomen. Besides satisfying the lusts, these clothes served to show everyone how great their victory was. It caressed the pride, the prestige increased. These are the characteristics of the enemy: being focused on themselves and seeking their own honor.

Let us be aware that what typifies the enemy is also present in our evil heart. We must prevent these characteristics from getting entrance with us. How? By looking at what happened to it on the cross of Calvary and what will happen to it when the Lord Jesus comes. On the cross the enemy is defeated. Yet he still wants to assert himself. He is given the opportunity to do so if we do not keep ourselves dead for sin and still let the flesh work.

When the Lord Jesus comes for the church, we will leave behind everything we have acquired through sin and flesh. None of it goes to heaven. Are we not stupid and foolish if we want to satisfy the desires of the flesh? Listen to what Deborah says in the last verse of her song.

Verse 31 | 8. Perish and Rise

*31 "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD;
But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might."
And the land was undisturbed for forty years.*

In this verse Deborah puts the enemies and the lovers of the LORD side by side. Note the end of each group. The enemies die, like Sisera and his army. Their rule is broken and gone forever; they are humiliated and destroyed.

Deborah calls the other group "those who love Him". These are the faithful mentioned in previous verses (verses 13,14,15,18). Their love for God and for His cause is expressed in the love they had for the cause of His people. It is easy to say that you love God. But you may only say so, if it is your sincere desire to show this in your actions, your whole behavior and attitude. Different tribes have clearly shown this in this chapter.

Whoever loves Him in this way, is compared to "the rising of the sun in its might". The sun shines its light and makes it day. This is a wonderful reference to the Lord Jesus. He is called "the sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2). He uses His light to expel the darkness from our lives, from all those areas where uncertainty or sin make our lives dark. The time to which Malachi refers is the time when the Lord Jesus will reign over the earth as the Son of Man. For one thousand years He will make sure that sin on earth does not have a chance to cause the misery that still exists today.

But He already wants to do that now in the lives of those who love Him. They may be "like" the sun. They may look like Him and increase therein, just as the sun increases in might. This will be a blessing to others, just as there is blessing for everyone when the Lord Jesus rules over the earth. However, there is still resistance and enmity. It will not be there anymore when He reigns.

A topic for further study is the following. The expression "who love Him (or God or Me)" still occurs a few times. Always something else is connected to it, like here the rising sun: Psa 145:20; Pro 8:17; Rom 8:28; 1Cor 2:9; Jam 1:12; 2:5. In response to these Scriptures, the reader can think about this special expression for himself.

Judges 6

Introduction

Gideon is not a deliverer about whom only one verse is written, as about Shamgar. Nor is he a deliverer standing in the shadow of a woman, like Barak. In Gideon we have a deliverer who is raised up and trained by God Himself. In contrast to the above mentioned judges, Gideon enables us to see his personal exercises and how he is led to align with God's thoughts.

God goes to work with Gideon. With wisdom and patience He makes Gideon an instrument that He can use to bless His people. The way God deals with Gideon is an example of how God prepares everyone who knows and loves Him and desires to serve Him to perform a service for Him. This service does not consist of a one-off action, but of a whole life of service.

Verse 1 | Given Into the Hands of Midian

1 Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years.

After forty years of rest, it again happens. A new generation has emerged in Israel. For them, God's interference with His people in the past is nothing but a thing of the past. This new generation is no better than their fathers. They also do what is evil in the sight of the LORD. Again God must let His discipline come upon the people. He loves them too much to let them go on the wrong path.

God wants to deal with His people. He would like to tell them what lives in His heart for them. He would also like them to tell Him what is in their hearts for Him. How it must grieve God to see His people react to all His love in this way. He wants to instruct and teach His people through their fellowship with Him. If they don't want to, He must instruct and teach them through the hands of an enemy.

This time God uses Midian. Midian is a family people of Israel. They are connected with each other through Abraham. Midian is a son of Abraham and Ketura (Gen 25:1-2). Seven years, which speaks of a complete period,

the Israelites sigh under this domination. The name Midian means 'strife'. Is this enemy not recognizable in the lives of many deviated Christians? Is he not also present in communities of faith where people are at odds with each other? In the following verses we see the effect of this.

Verse 2 | In the Dens, the Caves and the Strongholds

2 The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.

Never before had the Israelites sunk so deeply. They are forced to be vagrants and refugees in their own land and they lose their freedom. This is the result when God's people no longer appreciate the things of God. The people are scattered, each digs his own hiding place, there is no unity anymore.

In a community of Christians where people can no longer enjoy together the blessings that God has given, where people no longer listen together to the Bible, quarrels and struggles easily prevail. Instead of looking at the Lord Jesus together, they look at each other. In doing so, one does not try to discover anything of the Lord Jesus in each other, but is annoyed by each other. The relationships can then become so clouded that there is no longer any trust in each other.

Instead of friendship, openness, trust, freedom, we keep our mouth shut and avoid each other. Suspicion comes and whispers behind the hand. They have buried themselves in their own positions, the dens and caves and the strongholds. It will be a trench war. The end is that people bite and devour each other (Gal 5:15). In this way the beauty of the Christian fellowship is corrupted and long-term friendships are broken. Lives embitter and faith communities explode.

Verse 3 | When Israel Had Sown

3 For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them.

The enemy knows exactly when he has to come: when Israel has sown. He will do everything he can to prevent the sown from rising, so that there is

no food for the people and they become powerless. To weaken the believer, satan does his utmost to deprive him of his food. Through all kinds of things he keeps him from reading the Bible or to go to meetings to be build up in the faith. He knows very well what means he can use with every member of God's people, drawing from a great arsenal.

The Midianites don't come alone. Amalek is also there. Amalek is a picture of the flesh. These two enemies always go hand in hand. In Galatians 5, one of the deeds, or the works, of the flesh is called "strife" (Gal 5:19-20). Consequently, a multitude of all kinds of evil goes along, which we see represented in "the sons of the east". Satan mobilizes all his powers to prevent a believer from collecting anything from the fruits of the land.

Verses 4-5 | No Sheep, Ox, or Donkey

4 So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. 5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it.

Gaza is a Philistine place. Here, as elsewhere, the Philistines make themselves one with the enemies of Israel. Gaza is a large warehouse for stolen goods brought there by the Midianites. So the proceeds of the land end up in Philistine hands.

We have seen before that Philistines represent nominal Christians, people who claim to belong to the people of God, but do not belong to them because they have no life from God. They claim the fruit of the land, the spiritual blessing, for themselves, while they rob it from those who truly form the people of God. This can only happen by the unfaithfulness of God's people, the church, because they do not live in what God has given. The joint enemies ensure that nothing remains for God's people to live from. As a result, there is no power.

What is left of the church when it comes to her testimony in the world? We see it in the book of Acts. How powerful is her witness in the beginning. But that power has disappeared. One of the reasons for this is that in professing Christianity the Bible is no longer presented to Christians as

the real food. People who do not possess the Spirit have ‘conquered’ the Bible and explain it according to their own insights. Another cause is that Christians themselves are not open to the pure Word of God. Paul warns Timothy that there will come a time “when they will not endure sound doctrine; but [wanting] to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires” (2Tim 4:3).

Thus, “no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey” is left. If the Bible no longer contains food for the Christian, it is over with the sacrifice, of which sheep and ox speak, and the service for the Lord, of which the donkey speaks.

Verse 6 | Brought Very Low

6 So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD.

The land of which God has said it is “a land where you will eat food without scarcity” (Deu 8:9), has fallen into great poverty. When we have a Bible at home, we have all the treasures of heaven within reach. But if we do not get around to open the Bible and read it prayerful, it is of no use to us.

We may know that we live in the land, in other words, that we are “blessed ... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly [places] in Christ” (Eph 1:3), but what use do we have of this if our lives are dominated by bitterness and strife? Despite our wealth we are paupers. It is time to cry to God, just as the Israelites do, so that He may give an outcome.

Verses 7-10 | A Prophet and His Message

7 Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, 8 that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. 9 I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, 10 and I said to you, “I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.””

The cry of the Israelites is answered by God, but not with a direct deliverance. God's answer is not what they expected. Before He is going to deliver His people, something else must first happen. To work that out, God is using a prophet for the first time in this book. He wants His people to feel sin in their conscience.

Their crying is apparently only the result of their misery and is not caused by its origin. In response to their call God's holy wisdom reveals, through the prophet, the cause of their misery. The aim is for the people to come to a thorough judgment of this cause. Only then can there be a sustainable recovery.

The prophet shows us the work of the Spirit of God Who shakes up the conscience of the people and points out where they have deviated. This is not a task for which the prophet is thanked. Jeremiah has experienced in person how the people of God would like to kill because of the words he speaks on behalf of God. Yes, as long as prophets say things that people like to hear, they have nothing to fear (Isa 30:10). Such prophets often have great success, but the result is not of long duration.

If God sends a prophet to point out the failures to the people, it is that they may see and confess the wrong, so that the way is open again for God to bless them. God's ultimate goal is always blessing. Therefore, a confession cannot be a fleeting, superficial matter. Such a confession does not work real repentance. If something has gone wrong in the life of a believer, it is necessary not only to confess the mistake, but also to understand its cause. A person is only truly restored when he has come to the sincere acknowledgment that his sin has come forth from his sinful nature.

A sin is not a beauty defect, but an expression of the sinful flesh that is not kept where it belongs, namely in death. Those who sincerely acknowledge this will no longer seek excuses for their actions, nor will they seek extenuating circumstances. Honest self-judgment, without declaring others to be guilty or joint guilty, is the best proof of the truthfulness of one's confession.

The name of the prophet is not mentioned, his name doesn't matter. With a prophet it is all about his message. The prophet does not make a long speech. He bears witness to God's actions for the benefit of His people in

the past. On God's side there is no failure. He contrasts the faithfulness of God with the disobedience of the people. The good which God has done for them should be reason enough to remain faithful to Him. Moreover, He has warned them not to worship any other gods. But unfortunately, the final word, the conclusion of the prophet must be: "But you have not obeyed Me." This must penetrate deep into the conscience of the people and do its beneficial work there.

In the meantime, the instrument is being prepared for his task. In Gideon, God has chosen to deliver His people.

Verse 11 | Gideon

11 Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save [it] from the Midianites.

The Angel of the LORD – this is the Lord Jesus, as we have seen before – comes to visit Gideon. Gideon is busy with the yield of the land. He doesn't want to let it fall into the hand of the Midianites; he wants to enjoy it himself.

The meaning of the names in this verse gives us an impression of Gideon's state of mind. Ophrah means 'dust'. Someone who is truly aware of the shame of God's people, who are subject to the world, will find himself in the dust. There is no boasting on any particular position, but deep humility. Joash means 'the LORD is support'. One who knows the weakness and hopelessness of the situation of God's people will seek and find support in the Lord.

By the name of Abiezer, which means 'my father is help', we can think of the same thing, while the thought of a relationship is added to it. We may know God as Father. Gideon means 'one who hews down'. Everything that exalts itself must be hewn down. Soon he will openly honor that name. Now he lives up to that name by throwing himself down into the dust (Ophrah).

Ophrah has an oak tree. The word oak literally means 'a strong tree'. If we combine the two, oak and Ophrah, we see a combination of strength and

weakness coming forward. We will see in the history of Gideon how the power of God works in the weakness of Gideon.

Gideon is busy beating out wheat in the wine press, an unusual place. The wine press is empty, which means that there is no joy. Wine is a picture of joy (Jdg 9:13). The wine press also suggests judgment (Isa 63:2-3). In days of strife and battle, when Midian prevails, we can only get some food from the wine press, which is by acknowledging the judgment God had to bring upon us.

Whoever really bends under this judgment, may look at the cross. That is ultimately the place where God's judgment of our unfaithfulness came on the Lord Jesus. For faith there is always food at that place and there only we are safe from 'Midian', the spirit of strife, because it cannot exist at the cross.

Gideon represents a principle. In him we see a spirit or mind that can deliver the people from strife and battle. He is unconsciously preparing himself to become the deliverer of the people. Those who are busy with the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross as told in the Word of God can be used by God at a certain moment to be a leader, shepherd, elder, deliverer.

Verse 12 | The LORD Is With You

12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."

Gideon will have looked up frightened when he suddenly hears a voice saying to him: "The LORD is with you." Yet he doesn't get scared. He only becomes this in verse 22 when he realizes Who has visited him. And what about "O valiant warrior"? At first sight, there is nothing of combativeness to be seen in this man hiding from the enemy. But for God it counts that Gideon is determined to provide himself with food. Despite the supremacy of the enemy, despite the fear of the Israelites, here is a man who is busy with the fruit of the land. Personal faithfulness, in a time when everyone accept things as they are, is here in the foreground. That's what God calls combativeness. Then, in His eyes, we're a warrior.

If we are personally engaged in deepening food from God's Word and not participating in or resigning to the 'strife' around us, we will experience the special nearness of the Lord. We will hear Him say that He is with us.

This commitment applies to every moment we engage with the Bible in a way that we can clearly hear the voice of God. This promise also applies to all the commands He gives us. This is how God begins His conversation with Gideon. Isn't that an encouraging start?

Verse 13 | Where Are All the Wonders of God?

13 Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

A conversation starts between Gideon and the LORD. It is wonderful to see how the LORD gives Gideon all the space to say how he experiences things. The LORD always answers Gideon's questions and answers him in the way only He can do. The answers are full of encouragement for everyone who receives a certain assignment from the Lord. We will see that much can be learned here about the formation of the servant – as we hopefully want to be one – who is to do a work for the Lord. Similar conversations are more common in the Bible, for example between Moses and the LORD (Exo 3:11-22; 4:1-12) and between Ananias and the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:10-19).

If we know that God is calling us to do something for Him, we may talk to Him about it. We may lodge any objections we may have. God listens to us and takes our objections seriously. He answers. There is one condition: God enters into dialogue with us as long as He sees in us the willingness to do what He asks of us. If our objections stem from unbelief and unwillingness, God will not continue with us (Exo 4:13-17).

There is still a beautiful character trait to be seen in Gideon. God has said: "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior." What does Gideon say? "If the LORD is with us." He identifies himself with the whole people. Although Gideon is personally faithful, he does not claim God for himself alone. God is the God of the whole people. The welfare of the whole people is close to his heart and not just his own welfare.

Then come the questions. Gideon has heard of all that God has done for the benefit of His people when He led them out of Egypt. Gideon believes

it. He does not doubt the history of the people and what God has done with and for them. But where is God now? Is He not the same anymore? Yes, He is, but the people are not. The LORD has abandoned them, at least Gideon experiences it like that.

In Romans 11 this question also arises: “God has not rejected His people, has He?” (Rom 11:1a). In the next verse the answer comes: “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew” (Rom 11:2a). God had to give them up to their enemies for a time because of the unfaithfulness of the people, but with the goal of bringing them back to Himself. In this way God will continue to take care of His people through the great Deliverer, the Messiah of the people, the Lord Jesus.

Here too, with Midian, God shows He has not rejected His people. He prepares a deliverer for his task and that is Gideon. When we hear him speak in this verse, we see two things which always go together in someone who is called by God to a task in the midst of His people. These two things are that he identifies himself with God’s people and that he believes the Word of God as it has been handed down to him by the fathers.

Verse 14 | The Command

14 The LORD looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?”

Gideon told God how hopeless the situation is. Now he gets the command to change that. Often it is the things we bring to God as a need that He tells us to do something about. We are then for God the most suitable instruments. If someone sees there is a need for children’s work, he or she will pray for it, possibly without thinking that it would be something for him- or herself. Yet the sense of need already indicates something of the commitment to this work for the Lord.

We can apply this to many other things. However, it only applies to people who, like Gideon, live in fellowship with God. It is about people who give the Lord all the space in their lives. In the lives of such people, Bible reading and prayer take a central place. That’s what their lives are all about, that’s what they draw their strength from.

God does not give Gideon any new power for His command, but says: “Go in this your strength.” What strength is this? It is the strength with which he has kept his food out of the hands of the enemies to enjoy it for himself. This also gives him enough strength to deliver Israel.

What the LORD then says to him must take away all doubt about his commission. Gideon may go in the Name of his Sender. He hears Him say: “Have I not sent you?” This is all that is needed, but also necessary to do a service work. Without Him telling us this, we cannot go. If we go anyway, we will make chunks.

Another important lesson in connection with the call to service work is that God calls someone who is busy. Gideon is at work when he is called. The same can be seen in the calling of the disciples by the Lord Jesus (Mt 4:18-22). God does not seek people who have nothing to do, but people who are diligent in doing ordinary, daily things.

Verse 15 | A New Objection

15 He said to Him, “O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.”

Gideon puts forward a new argument, which leads him to believe that he cannot meet God’s command: he does not feel able to do so. Now it is always good not to think too high of yourself. To this end, each of us is exhorted in Romans 12, where Paul says “to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think” (Rom 12:3). But this should never be an excuse to withdraw from what God asks of us.

Gideon points out his humble background and the place he occupies in the family to which he belongs. Manasseh is the tribe that is the only one which is divided. One half lives in the land and the other half lives outside of it. He knows what it means to be in a situation of division. Often you have already seen so much quarrel and strife with the additional misery that you no longer like fighting any more, even if it is the good fight.

His place in the family – he is the youngest – seems to indicate that he has never really been involved into family life. This also happened to David (1Sam 16:4-11). David is simply forgotten when Samuel has called the

whole family together. This can give a feeling that you are worthless, unimportant, that you are of no use. Gideon may have felt like this.

Maybe that's how we feel. Yet we can be sure that God can start something with us just then. Our weakness and not being counted with others makes us suitable as a tool for God. What God wants to do through us must be ascribed solely to Him and not to us. Is it not great that God wants to use us in our smallness and weakness?

Listen to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12. When he has prayed to be delivered from something that makes him weak and despicable, the Lord says to him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2Cor 12:9a). Paul's answer is: "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2Cor 12:9b-10). Well, this is what we have to come to. Not feeling strong in our own ability, but feeling weak; then God can do His work with us.

Gideon looks upon himself and then there is no strength. But the small 'I' is just as great an obstacle to being used by God as the big 'I'. If we acknowledge this, we may say what Paul says: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

Verse 16 | I Will Be With You

16 But the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."

The way the LORD deals with Gideon's last argument is encouraging. In verse 14 he is supported in his commission by the consciousness that the LORD is his Sender. This gives value to the task he has to perform. In this verse it goes one step further. The LORD says He Himself goes with him.

This promise of the Lord also applies now. After His resurrection He commands His disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20a). To this He adds, and with this concludes the Gospel according to Matthew,

so that these words, as it were, continue to resound in the disciples' ears: "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20b).

In the past centuries, many people have been encouraged by these words and have fulfilled the task assigned to them. Let us also be encouraged by these words for the tasks we have been given. Even if we have an army of helpers around us, but we do not have the Lord, we will still lose. Even if we are all alone, but we have the Lord at our side, we will be able to defeat the greatest enemy army "as one man". The history of Gideon will teach us that this is truly the 'logic' of faith.

Verse 17 | The Question for a Sign

17 So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me."

Gideon is now convinced of his mission and is encouraged by the LORD's promises. Nevertheless, he has one more request. He wants absolute certainty that he is dealing with the LORD Himself. He considers this assurance essential for the accomplishment of his mission. That's why he asks for a sign.

A good example, worth imitating, we have in the way in which Gideon asks his question. He does not do this from an attitude that speaks of the right he would have to a sign. His attitude shows that he cannot claim it: "If now I have found favor in Your sight."

The request for a sign does not fit the New Testament believer. He does not need a sign, because he has the whole Word of God and also the Holy Spirit Who dwells in him. Those who want certainty about a certain matter can read the Word of God and ask God in prayer if He wants to make things clear through His Word and Spirit. God can also use others for this, for example in meetings where the Word is preached, or through personal conversations with believers who live with the Lord.

Gideon does not possess the full revelation of God, nor does he possess the Holy Spirit indwelling in him. That is why his request for a sign is not wrong. It can be noted that also in the Old Testament, God is most honored by unconditional faith. Nor is it necessary at that time to ask for a sign to know God's will or to confirm what He has said.

Clear evidence of this can be found in Hebrews 11. Of the believers listed there it is always accompanied by the phrase that they have done something “by faith” without having received any visible signs. Gideon is also mentioned there. He was not guided by signs in the first place, but by faith.

A verse that has been of great significance throughout the ages in the search for the will of God is: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you” (Psa 32:8). As we discuss verses 36-40, we hear a little more about asking for a sign to know the will of God.

Verse 18 | I Will Remain

18 Please do not depart from here, until I come [back] to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You.” And He said, “I will remain until you return.”

It is striking: God meets Gideon’s request. It almost seems like a command to Him, but He does what Gideon has asked. How merciful He is in His dealings with Gideon and with us when He sees the sincere desire to honor Him. He then ignores a lot of ignorance. Gideon wants to offer something to the LORD. Through conversation with Him, Gideon’s desire to bring an offering has arisen. This is what God sees in his heart and He wants to wait for it.

When we have spoken to the Lord Jesus, do we also have the desire to offer Him an offering? We can express ourselves in thanksgiving and expressing our admiration for Him and what He has done.

Verses 19-20 | The Offering

19 Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought [them] out to him under the oak and presented [them]. 20 The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so.

While Gideon prepares his offering, the LORD waits patiently. The offering he brings is not small when we consider that it is a time of great scarcity (verse 4).

A young goat, the animal that Gideon prepares as an offering, is usually used to bring a sin offering (Lev 4:23; 16:5). Through this offering Gideon expresses something from which we can learn a lot. The sin offering is a picture of the Lord Jesus in His work on the cross, where He underwent the judgment on sin. Gideon shows that he is aware that for the sin of the people and for him personally there is only salvation through sacrifice. We know that it speaks of what the Lord Jesus did on the cross.

The other offering he brings, the “unleavened breads from an ephah of flour”, is reminiscent of the grain offering described in different ways in Leviticus 2. This is a non-bloody offering and speaks of the life of the Lord Jesus.

It is a joy for God when we tell Him Who the Lord Jesus was in His life on earth and in His work on the cross. We do not come with literal sacrifices, but with spiritual sacrifices. The Lord Jesus says: “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people, the Father seeks to be His worshipers” (Jn 4:23). If we have seen anything of the beauty and glory of the Son of God, God the Father will rejoice when we say it to Him.

The Lord Jesus adds something else: “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24). God does not leave it to our politeness how we worship Him. He longs for us to come, but also indicates how we should come. It must be “in spirit”, that is, guided by the Holy Spirit, in a spiritual way, and not according to human programming. It must also be in “truth”, that is, according to the revelation He gave of Himself in the Bible and not as we believe we can think of God.

With Gideon this is also the case. In verse 20, God indicates what to do with the offering. He must bring it on the rock, also a picture of Christ (1Cor 10:4b; Mt 16:18). The verse concludes beautifully with “and he did so”. It indicates the beautiful mind of Gideon. It is to be hoped that this is also our mind.

Verse 21 | God Accepts the Offering

21 Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the

rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

The way in which the LORD deals with the offering is impressive. He touches it with the staff He has in His hand. That staff is a ruler's staff, a scepter. Such a staff is supported by distinguished individuals who have authority over others. It is a sign of royal dignity (Est 4:11; 5:2). The LORD in His exaltedness and majesty accepts the offering that Gideon brings in weakness.

Fire comes out of the rock, a picture of the investigative and testing holiness of God, and consumes the offering. After having accepted the offering of Gideon in this way the LORD disappears from sight.

Through this offering, Gideon takes his true place before God. It is only on the basis of Christ's sacrifice that a person is pleasing to God and God can accept him. This lays the foundation for Gideon's further service.

Verse 22 | Woe to Me

22 When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."

Then it sounds "alas" in the sense of "woe to me". Gideon has become aware that he has stood face-to-face with God. This consciousness breaks him. Every thought of oneself and one's own powerlessness disappears. Only the LORD remains in His greatness and glory, and this is the right starting point for the coming battle. It makes one small and at the same time it gives confidence.

In Isaiah we see the same reaction when he is called by God. He beholds the LORD sitting on a high and exalted throne, hearing the seraphs crying out to one another, " "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, ... Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa 6:1-5). Isaiah comes to this personal exclamation after in Isaiah 5 he has spoken "woe to them" up to six times over different groups of people and the different sins they commit (Isa 5:8-23).

Before he can be sent to them, he must first acknowledge that he himself is no better. God brings him to this end by placing him face to face with Him-

self and His glory. This makes him cry out a ‘woe’ for the seventh time, but now over himself. Then the LORD gives Isaiah the proof of forgiveness and he is ready to go where He wants to send him and to do what He asks of him: “Here am I. Send me!” (Isa 6:6-8).

This is the best and most thorough way to prepare the servant for his task. On the one hand it gives a deep impression of who man is and shows his own unworthiness and incompetence. On the other hand, this impression is made in the presence of God the Almighty, and this is an enormous encouragement to do what He asks of us. He sends and is with everyone who stands on the basis of the sacrifice of His Son (Jdg 6:14,16,21).

Verses 23-24 | Peace

23 The LORD said to him, “Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.” 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Then Gideon hears the words “peace to you” from the mouth of the LORD. He doesn’t have to be afraid because he stood face to face with the LORD. He was accepted by God through sacrifice, right? He can now go in peace. Many have received this peace for their conscience after they have accepted in faith the work of the Lord Jesus: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). This is the peace of which the Lord Jesus speaks when He says: “Peace I leave with you” (Jn 14:27a).

Because of the peace with God that the Lord Jesus worked on the cross, there is no place left for fear of God. Being afraid of God in fact means failing to appreciate His appreciation of the work of the Lord Jesus. God accepted the work of His Son and gave proof of it by raising Him from the dead and giving Him a place in heaven at His right hand.

Gideon’s fear is gone and he builds an altar with the beautiful name: “The LORD is peace.” This shows that Gideon no longer suffers from fear. He does not take his own feelings as a starting point, but the LORD Himself. The peace he now possesses is not the result of a good feeling, but of Whom the LORD is. He has made that peace. This makes Gideon a worshiper, of which the altar speaks that he builds. Here we see the first effect of receiving peace: God is worshiped for it.

This peace also has a practical effect on Gideon's life. This should also be the case in our lives. He has shown the inner peace he now possesses in fulfilling the task entrusted to him. This peace has remained a testimony in the area where he lives. It is not a passing peace. He lived in that peace and thus fought the enemies.

This is the peace of which the Lord Jesus speaks when He says: "My peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27b). This peace is His own peace which He had in the way He has gone because the Father had instructed Him to go that way. This peace may be the part of anyone who has a task to perform by order of God. It is this peace that the various writers at the beginning of many New Testament letters wish to their readers.

Verse 25 | The First Task: Pull down and Cut down

25 Now on the same night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it;

Gideon receives his first command after God has brought him into the right relationship to Him. Now God can start using him. But before He allows Gideon to perform in public, he first has to work in his family. He has to start at home. The same the Lord Jesus makes clear to His disciples when He instructs them to testify of Him and to do so "beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk 24:47), that is, in their immediate environment, close to home. Then they can go on to "all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The mission Gideon receives is clear. He has just built an altar for the LORD and at home there is still an altar of Baal. These two altars cannot go together. He who builds an altar for the Lord, will have to come to pull down every other altar. Only then can a testimony be given in the battle for the Lord. Baal must be removed first, otherwise the victory could be attributed to him. The Asherah, the sacred pole that stands next to it, must also be removed. The sacred pole seems to be a kind of protection of the altar. Both the altar and the pole have to be cut down. Here the name Gideon, 'one who hews down', is given its practical meaning.

In the altar of Baal we can see the reverence that people can have for all kinds of things in their lives, without God having His place in it. We remember that Baal means ‘lord’. For example, there may be things in our lives that have authority over us that dominate us. We use plausible reasons to delude ourselves that these things should be present in our lives.

An example can clarify things. A certain sport can occupy such a large place in our lives that we do everything for it. We delude ourselves that it is useful for our body. To be used by the Lord, we will have to judge both our attitude toward the sport and our utility reasons. By this I do not mean to say that it is wrong to do sport. I just want to point out that it can be an ‘altar’ in our life that needs to be cut down, along with the wrong ideas with which we defend this ‘altar’.

Verse 26 | The Second Task: To Build and To Offer

26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.”

Hewing down the wrong is not the only task Gideon gets. He also has to build a new altar. Then he has to offer his father’s second bull with the wood of the Asherah, the sacred pole. What does all this mean? Something new must take the place of the old. The old has to do with Baal, the new with the LORD.

In verse 24, Gideon spontaneously builds an altar to express the worship that is in his heart for the LORD. Now God orders him to build a new altar. You could call this the altar of his testimony for God. He has to build it in a place that is visible to everyone. With this he openly shows that he chooses against Baal and for God.

Together with the second bull, the wood of the sacred pole must be sacrificed. That is, all the reasoning we have had so far to justify our service to ‘Baal’ will find its end in the sacrificial death of Christ. We acknowledge that in the death of Christ, all thoughts arising from our flesh are judged.

The second bull speaks of the Lord Jesus. The second is preferred over the first. This is reminiscent of the “first man” and the “second Man” (1Cor 15:47). The first man, Adam, has failed; the second Man, Christ, has an-

swered God's wishes in all things. Gideon has to take the second bull because it is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus, Who has always served God with complete dedication, opposite to a constantly failing people.

Verse 27 | Gideon Does It at Night

27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

In the company of ten servants, Gideon sets off to carry out his task. In Ruth 4 we also find ten men (Rth 4:2). They propose an adequate testimony, as the law is. What Gideon does, can be confirmed by these men, they can testify what happened and how it happened. When it comes to acting, Gideon is not a loner, someone who does everything alone. He makes sure that he is backed by witnesses. However, he did not yet have the courage to give his testimony in broad daylight. He does it by night.

Who will blame him? I remember very well that for the first time, I was going to spread gospel tracts in the neighborhood where I lived then. I only did that in the evening, when it had become dark. Nicodemus is also such a person. He too does not dare to openly admit at first that he has an interest in the Lord Jesus (Jn 3:1-2). But that has changed. Later in the Gospel according to John we hear how he stands up for the Lord Jesus against his fellow Pharisees (Jn 7:50-51). And later, his love for the Lord Jesus becomes apparent when he comes with "a mixture of myrrh and aloes" when the Lord is buried (Jn 19:39-42). Both in John 7 and in John 19 it is recalled that he "had first come to Him by night".

In any case, Gideon acts in obedience. And if there is obedience, the consequences can be left to God. If we do what God asks of us, God does for us what we cannot do. God stands up for Gideon against his enemies.

Verses 28-32 | Overcoming the Opposition

28 When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built. 29 They said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched about and

inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing." 30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it." 31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar." 32 Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he had torn down his altar.

The next day, when the inhabitants of the city discover what has happened, there is great consternation. After investigation it appears that Gideon is the culprit. That is why his life is demanded.

There is nothing which arises more enmity than contempt for one's religion. You will bring down the anger of supporters upon your head when you dare to say something negative about their club. Sport, especially football in the Netherlands, has become religion. Biblical expressions are used to glorify football stars. They are called 'sons of gods'.

And what about the power of islam? Testimonies from converted muslims state that they are threatened with death, because their faith in the Lord Jesus means that they have renounced islam. This shows to God that their former religion has become worthless to them. The same often applies to a converted Jew. Anyone who chooses the true God in an environment where people have made gods according to their own imagination, and openly expresses this will have to take into account strong opposition.

This public testimony regarding God is the moment when He brings a turn in the events. Behind the scenes, He stands up for Gideon. He uses Gideon's father for this. Gideon's boldness by night made his father bold during the day. Gideon's father makes a call to the minds of the inhabitants of the city with a sober story. He states quite simply that if Baal is a god, he should avenge himself for the irreverence he has been subjected to. This is reminiscent of the challenge Elijah expresses in his confrontation with the priests of Baal on the question of Who really is God (1Kgs 18:24-29).

The men of the city have no reply. They only give Gideon the name "Jerubbaal", in which they express that they expect Baal to avenge himself on Gideon. This name seems to have become an honorary name when it appears that nothing happens to Gideon.

Through what Gideon has done what is in people's hearts is revealed. They clearly declare that they acknowledge Baal as their god. When we openly stand up for God and His truth, it also makes clear today what lives in the hearts of those around us.

The people who want to kill Gideon for what he has done are people from his own city. If we clearly testify in word and deed that we have chosen the Lord Jesus, we will meet resistance. Most opposition may come from those who are closest to us, but do not partake in the Lord Jesus, while they feel themselves to be very religious. If we, as children of God, see the wrong in our own lives and remove it from it, it hurts if it is not the world that makes remarks about it, but fellow believers that react negatively to it.

If we choose for God against the wrong, we can count on God to stand up for us. He is on our side. How He shows this is different in every situation. It is certain that He will give an unexpected outcome if we do faithfully and obediently what He asks of us, just as He did with Gideon.

Verses 33-35 | The Spirit Comes upon Gideon

33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel. 34 So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

The enemy becomes active every time things happen in God's people that speak of a renewed awareness that God is there and that only He is entitled to His people. We have seen this activity in the enemy also in Judges 4 (Jdg 4:12-13). The enemy is getting ready to confirm and strengthen his claim on the land. This is the moment when the Spirit of the LORD comes upon Gideon. Literally it says that the Spirit of the LORD is the clothing of Gideon. The Spirit simply uses Gideon as His instrument. The Spirit is upon Gideon and acts through Gideon (cf. 1Chr 12:18).

Of course the Spirit is already active in this chapter but now He comes upon Gideon to work through him and to chase away the enemy. It is one

thing to know that the Spirit is active in your life; it is another thing to actually let the Spirit use you to achieve victories in your life.

What has been mentioned in the previous verses about Gideon is a preparation to make him someone who can be used by the Holy Spirit. In that preparation Gideon has shown his faithfulness and obedience to the LORD. This is the fertile soil on which the Holy Spirit can build further. It is said to us: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). The command – for that it is – to be filled with the Spirit follows some things that should or should not be present in a Christian walk of life (Eph 5:1-17). He who is filled with the Spirit cannot at that moment be led by the flesh.

After the command to be filled with the Spirit follows: "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph 5:19). This is a wonderful result of being filled with the Spirit. What we have to say to each other will then happen in a melodious way, regardless of whether it is about encouragement, comfort or admonition. It seems that we can compare this with the blowing of the trumpet by Gideon. The result is that the Abiezrites, his family, come to him.

If the Spirit of God has the opportunity to fill the hearts, it is the beginning of the end of the battle among the believers. After all, Midian means 'strife', isn't it? Through the trumpet – a picture of the Word of God we listen to – the people are gathered and unity is created. If we strive to "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3), the battle will cease.

Gideon also sends messengers to his own tribe, Manasseh, and to other, northern tribes. They all join him. Manasseh is the only tribe in Israel that is divided over two areas. There is one half in the land, the other half is outside the land, on the wilderness side of the Jordan. Because of this Gideon knows from his own experience what division means. Perhaps this has been an extra incentive for him to do everything possible to bring about unity among God's people.

Those who know what division is, caused by struggles within their own ranks with its disastrous consequences, will fight to bring God's people back together and keep them together. Every division among the people of God causes much suffering among believers and is to the Lord's dishonor.

This does not mean that at all costs the unity must be preserved or processed. The unity to be preserved is that of the Spirit, not that of the flesh or any other unity made by man. However, this does not take away the pain and shame of such an event. It is to be hoped that the Spirit will have the opportunity to work in our lives to promote the welfare of the church and to make its unity visible.

Verses 36-40 | The Fleece

36 Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, 37 behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken." 38 And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. 39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground." 40 God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

It is remarkable how God meets all of Gideon's questions with reference to his mission. God has already clearly told what He wants of Gideon (verses 14-16). When Gideon asks for a sign, He gives it (verse 17). Now Gideon asks for confirmation of his assignment, even twice. He is not accused, but God gives him what he asks for, even up to two times.

The 'putting of a fleece' has become proverbial when it comes to knowing the will of God in a particular matter. It is asking for a sign to confirm the fulfillment of a task that someone wants to take on. In itself, it is not wrong for anyone to want certainty about what they want to do for the Lord.

Something has already been said about the questioning of a sign in the discussion of verse 17. The following can be added in connection with 'the fleece'. God can also make clear or confirm His will through the circumstances in which a person finds himself or ends up. An example we see in the life of Joni Eareckson Tada. This woman became completely disabled as a result of a dive in shallow water through which she broke her neck. She is still used by God in a special way.

Now it is not necessary that our circumstances change as drastically as it happened with hers. It is about indicating that things can happen in our lives through which we know: this is what God asks of me. That, by the way, will never be things that go against His Word. If, for example, a believer prays for a spouse and the circumstances seem to bring someone on his way, but it turns out to be an unbeliever, then this can never be the guidance of God. For He forbids in His Word that a believer marries an unbeliever (2Cor 6:14).

Now a word about the spiritual meaning of the fleece in relation to the land around it and the dew. A sign means something, represents something, refers to something. Dew speaks of refreshment. It is the freshness of a new day. The Old Testament describes dew several times as a blessing from heaven for the land of God.

When Gideon asks in the first sign for dew on the fleece and drought on all the ground around it, it seems like a representation of the blessing of God for His earthly people Israel, while the peoples around them have no part in it. Israel has forfeited the blessing by rejecting their Messiah, but it is kept for later. Perhaps we can see this symbolically represented in draining the dew from the fleece, filling a bowl with water for later use.

The second sign represents the opposite, because now the fleece stays dry and the ground around it gets wet by the dew. This means that, after the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, God puts His people aside and He blesses the nations.

Both 'signs' can be found in the letter to the Romans. There we read as to Israel about "their transgression", "their failure", "their rejection". These expressions show that they have been set aside by God. As a result of "their transgression salvation [has come] to the Gentiles", and there is talk of the "riches for the world", "the riches for the Gentiles" and "the reconciliation of the world" (Rom 11:11-15).

But that does not mean that Israel has been rejected forever. There will come a time which in that section is called "their fulfillment" (Rom 11:12) and "acceptance" (Rom 11:15). Then Israel will still receive the blessing. In both signs it is clear that God does it. Gideon contributes nothing to it. Only God is able to give the blessing, both to Israel and to the whole world.

The place where Gideon lays down the fleece is also important. He chooses the threshing floor. This is the place where he first met the LORD and where he showed his appreciation for God's blessing (verse 11). There he was busy with the fruit of the land. From the place that speaks of the judgment that the Lord Jesus underwent on the cross, all the refreshment and strength comes to do the work that we are instructed to do.

As said, Gideon doesn't have to do anything. What he does do, is get up early, in which he shows his longing for the result. The way in which Gideon addresses the LORD here, resembles that of Abraham in his intercession for Sodom for the benefit of Lot (Gen 18:23-33; 19:29).

Judges 7

Introduction

We see Gideon here in connection with the people and in his public performance. After Gideon, the people are now being prepared for their service. The army that will help him consists of carefully selected people. The selection criteria are different from those we use. Nothing is imposed on them. Every soldier is given the opportunity to prove that he meets the criteria. These criteria have nothing to do with physical strength or military insight. The most important principle is total commitment to the LORD's cause with abandonment of any other interest.

Some characteristics of people who meet these requirements are:

1. They are brave (verse 3).
2. They only take with them what they need (verse 6).
3. They look after their captain and obey him (verse 17).
4. They let their light shine (verse 20).
5. They use the cry of war (verse 20).
6. They stand in their own place (verse 21).

In the discussion of this chapter we will discuss these characteristics more in detail, but it is good to let them affect us already now. We also want to be part of a 'Gideon's band' to gain victories for the Lord and His people, don't we?

Verse 1 | Harod and Moreh

1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

Then Gideon starts his task. He is called Jerubbaal here. Each time he is referred to by this name, it is a reminder of his victory over Baal in Judges 6 (Jdg 6:25-32). Now he goes out to achieve new victories. Early in the morning he rises.

Also in other important events in the Bible we see that people rise early. Thus Abraham rises early when he sacrifices his son Isaac (Gen 22:3). Job also rises early in the morning to search God's face for his children (Job 1:5). In the history of God's people on earth through the centuries, people who have meant a lot to the work of the Lord have often been people who rose early.

We've already seen that Gideon isn't the type of hero that is appreciated in this world. Until now, he has always seemed a little frightened. The place where he and the people camp is called Harod, which means 'trembling'. They are close to the enemy, who is in an overwhelming crowd at the hill of Moreh. Moreh means 'fear'. The impression that the enemy makes on the people is one of fear and trembling.

This is no different today. The greatest weapon of the enemy, the devil, is the fear he can instill in people. I was given an example of this when I saw demons being driven out of a young man. In a conversation we had after that event, I asked why it was possible that these evil spirits had taken hold of his life. His answer was: fear. Those who fear the devil fall prey to his attacks. The Christian may know that he is in the victory that the Lord Jesus gained on the cross. In Him we are even more than victors. To know this and to live up to it are two things.

What Gideon experiences, all do who want to do a work for the Lord. The intimidation of the devil, who in many ways will try to destroy the work of the Lord, comes at anyone who declares himself willing to fight for the Lord. The miraculous thing is that God uses the trembling to sift the army that has declared itself willing to chase away the enemy.

Verse 2 | Too Many Soldiers

2 The LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'"

Gideon is told a remarkable word: "The people who are with you are too many for Me." Has anything like this ever been heard by a people who are going to wage war? His army consists of 32,000 men. But what do they

mean against an army of at least 135,000 men (Jdg 8:10)? The ratio is already 1 to 4.

Yet God finds Gideon's army too big. The reason He gives is that Israel will boast of having overcome in its own power when it wins. God will be forgotten. He wants to prevent the people from becoming arrogant and proud, so that the Israelites will again deviate from Him. They, and we, must know how God works: "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts" (Zec 4:6).

It is instructive to compare what God says here with the events in Joshua 7-8. With all the conquests in the book of Joshua the whole people have to go up. In the case of little Ai, Joshua thinks it is not necessary. But God cannot do anything with human considerations. All He asks is obedience and then He takes care of the rest. The result is that Israel is defeated (Jos 7:1-5). Luckily, there will be a second chance (Jos 8:1-29). Then victory is achieved. But a lot of effort is required. They should have acted directly according to God's will. That would have saved them all that extra trouble.

In the book of Judges the time is over that the whole people can go up. Decay has left its mark on the condition of the people of God. It is the same now. We live in a time when the church is no longer building up a unity. It is also, however, a time when enormous challenges await those who wish to dedicate themselves entirely to the Lord.

Verse 3 | The First Selection

3 Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.'" So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained.

The army must be stripped of all elements that could stand in the way of victory. The first element is fear. Any person who, on closer inspection, is very reluctant to fight with a powerful enemy, may return home. This is in keeping with the law of war that God has given His people: "Then the officers shall speak further to the people and say, 'Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted? Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brothers' hearts melt like his heart'" (Deu 20:8). It is extremely discouraging when some people in the heat of the battle suddenly

start to lose their heads and leave. This is why everyone must know what they are doing in advance. The costs must be considered (Lk 14:31,33).

The people who are allowed to leave first are those who are more under the impression of the power of the enemy than of the power of God. They did show up to fight after Gideon's call, but now that they are face to face with the enemy, it turns out that they have little faith.

We too can be attracted by someone who enthusiastically brings forward a plan to do a work for the Lord. The person who does so is himself motivated for this plan because he has spoken about it with the Lord. It is an assignment he has been given. It is a good thing that he wants to involve others. But those others will only become good co-workers when they have gone through this plan themselves with the Lord and do not go along only on the basis of the enthusiastic story.

You can be impressed by someone else's faith in a particular work, but that is different from personal faith in that particular work. For people who only want to participate on the basis of an emotional impression of the moment and not on the basis of a personal conviction, there is no place in this work. That can and must also be said.

Something similar Paul does when he asks for intercession to be "rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith" (2Thes 3:2). He does not need the help of people who do not have the same faith and dedication to the work of the Lord that characterizes him.

What will have gone through Gideon when he sees his already small army getting smaller and smaller? No less than 22,000 men go home. If the ratio first is still 1 to 4, and that is by no means a great starting point, now it has been reduced to the, in human eyes, impossible ratio of 1 to 13/14.

Verse 4 | The Second Selection

4 Then the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

What would have gone through Gideon's mind when the LORD says to him: "The people are still too many?" In any case, we do not hear any objections from Gideon. His attitude is beautiful here. He always connects to what the LORD says to him.

If the first selection leaves it to everyone to decide for themselves, this is not the case with this second selection. The 10,000 that remain will be tested by the LORD, and without them noticing. Gideon must invite them to go to the water, and the LORD says to him: "I will test them for you there." The way in which the water should be drunk is not indicated. Everyone is free to do so as he likes. Yet the way of drinking water determines whether someone belongs to the corps of the electorate, or whether he is declared unfit for battle.

Verses 5-6 | The Drinking Attitude

5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink." 6 Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water.

God could have selected the warriors in every conceivable way, but He ensures that the real warriors reveal themselves. The natural attitude to drinking is kneeling down, focusing on drinking. Whoever does not kneel, but takes the water with his hand, remains ready to take action at any moment. This unnatural attitude of drinking makes it clear that the principle of faith prevails and not drinking itself. What is revealed by the water is the difference between those who drink the water at their leisure and those who drink it casually because they are engaged in the battle.

Thirst may be quenched. It is written of the Lord Jesus: "He will drink from the brook by the wayside; therefore He will lift up [His] head" (Psa 110:7). He has found here and there a refreshment for His soul, but without ever losing sight of the purpose of His coming: the triumph of the cross and the glorification of God, His Father.

Thirst may be quenched, but the question is what place it occupies in our lives to quench thirst. We can compare taking water with the needs of life,

such as food, clothing and covering, and also the necessary rest after work. What matters is what place these things occupy in our lives. God sees how we deal with it, without us even noticing. The way we deal with earthly matters makes it clear how we view the things of God.

Putting water in the hand means that we only take in those earthly things what we can control and what do not dominate us. It is to live in this awareness: “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything” (1Cor 6:12b). The dedicated Christian is free to enjoy everything. At the same time, he is aware that there are things that may jeopardize his dedication to the Lord. He only takes what he can hold in his hand, nothing more.

Lapping as a dog laps means taking the place of a dog. This is the place taken for example by Mephiboseth opposite David (2Sam 9:8). It speaks of the acknowledgment that we in ourselves are not worthy to be or do anything for the Lord. The Lord’s grace increases when we think about who we are and what He wants to use us for, despite what we are in ourselves.

Not only bravery and courage are required, but also complete dedication, and this proves itself in the way we deal with earthly blessings. The dedicated Christian can be recognized by doing only one thing, to which everything else is subordinated. Paul says, “One thing [I do]” (Phil 3:13). He forgets what lies behind him and reaches forward to Christ Jesus. Because of this attitude, he can rightly say to Timothy, and to us: “No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier” (2Tim 2:4).

The Lord Jesus said to Martha, who is busy with earthly, necessary things: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but [only] one thing is necessary” (Lk 10:41-42). This one thing is sitting at His feet, as Mary does. She is told that she has chosen the good part. What Martha does is not wrong in itself, it is even necessary. But she gives it such a great place that listening to the Lord is compromised, and that is what the Lord wants to teach her.

Verses 7-8 | The 300 Men

7 The LORD said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the [other] people go,

each man to his home.” 8 So the 300 men took the people’s provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the [other] men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

There they go. Of the 10,000 that remained, he has to send another 9,700 away. They have proven, without wanting to, that they were not committed enough to be used in the battle against Midian. Again we read nothing of Gideon’s defense.

God has achieved His goal. The remaining army of 300 men is totally powerless in itself to drive out the enemy. The ratio has become 1 to 450. All hope for the success of this undertaking must be expected from the LORD. And that is exactly what He wants. We hear what the LORD says to Gideon: “I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands.” The LORD says: “I will.” If He says so, there can be no doubt about the outcome. He guarantees the successful outcome of the battle. This is the great encouragement Gideon gets. First he receives this promise and only then does God tell him that the rest of the people can leave.

But before those 9,700 leave, they give their provisions and trumpets to the men who will fight. This shows a nice character trait. Although they may not be part of the chosen army unit, they support the warriors with their resources. There is nothing of jealousy.

Even if we may not actually be able to participate in the battle, perhaps because we are too busy with earthly things, we can still help by providing the warriors with what is needed. In this way, even on the sidelines, we contribute to the victory that is achieved and we share in its joy.

Then the 9,700 leave. But he “retained the 300 men”. The word “retained” means “hold firmly”. This may indicate that the 300 men have a strong desire to follow the example of their departing colleagues and that Gideon needs to talk firmly to them to keep them with him. Indeed, it is no small thing to observe a massive exodus and to have to conclude that there are only a few left. Then the tendency becomes great to follow the mass on their retreat. The battle is still to be fought. To make it clear once again that

the seriousness of the crisis has not changed, at the end of verse 8 the Holy Spirit again points to the presence of enemies.

Fortunately, the 300 men stay with him. It is reminiscent of what we read in John 6. In reference to everything the Lord Jesus has told us in that chapter, it says at the end of that chapter: "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life"" (Jn 6:66-68).

Although these are different events, in both cases the matter is the choice we make. If we are inwardly convinced that the Lord Jesus provides everything we need, we will want to stay with Him. Whatever happens and no matter how many people drop out because the sacrifices become too great, it will not make us doubt the faithfulness of the Lord.

Verse 9 | The Command

9 Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands."

When the preparations are over, the LORD tells Gideon to go to the camp to attack the enemy. Gideon gets the certainty of victory. God has already given him this certainty in Judges 6 (Jdg 6:16). God has also met Gideon's doubt when he asks for the sign with the fleece (Jdg 6:36-40).

When God commands to invade the enemy's camp, He confirms, to exclude all doubt, His promise to give the enemy into Gideon's power. Gideon has to deal with a defeated enemy. All he has to do is to appropriate the victory.

Something similar has been said to Joshua (Jos 1:1-9). God has given the Israelites the whole land. They only had to take possession of it. There too He says He would be with them.

Verses 10-14 | A Dream to Encourage

10 But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, 11 and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be

strengthened that you may go down against the camp.” So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp. 12 Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. 13 When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, “Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.” 14 His friend replied, “This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.”

God knows the heart of His servant. Despite all the encouragements and promises, there is still a glitch in Gideon’s heart. There is still a residue of doubt. And see how God meets this too. What a God full of patience He is!

The way in which He strengthens Gideon’s hands requires courage. Together with his servant Purah, Gideon must enter the enemy’s army to hear something that will encourage him. How wonderful is the way of God to encourage Gideon. Gideon must actually go to the enemy to hear something there, while God Himself has so often pointed out to him the power that is present in Him.

What God still wants to teach him is that the enemy is more impressed by this power than he is. The enemy already sees himself as defeated, although he never gives in and must actually be defeated. Gideon hears it from the mouth of his enemies: “God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand” (verse 14).

The spies who in Joshua 2 went to spy out the land and came to Rahab the harlot have heard the same. Rahab says to them “that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you” (Jos 2:9). They have heard what great deeds the LORD has done for his people (Jos 2:10-11). Despite this knowledge, Jericho did not surrender either, but had to be conquered.

Gideon takes his servant Purah with him on the command of God. The name Purah means ‘wine press’ or ‘growth’. If God calls this servant of Gideon by name, it may be to remind Gideon of His appearance to him when he was beating out wheat in the wine press (Jdg 6:11). Remembering our previous encounters with the Lord and what He has said to us on

those occasions often gives us courage to continue. Such memories also indicate that there is spiritual growth through the relationship with Him.

Gideon accepts God's offer. He goes and hears one of the Midianites tell a dream. He even hears the dream interpreted by another Midianite. We do not know how the man knows the meaning of the dream. We may assume that God has shown him that the meaning. If God can control things in such a way that Gideon comes to that tent at the right time to witness this conversation, He is also able to let that man say things that are important to Gideon.

What Gideon hears reminds him how weak he is in himself. He is presented in the dream as a barley bread. But the explanation shows that God makes a sword of it to defeat the enemies. Barley bread is the bread of the poor. God often works through poverty and weakness.

The sword that brings victory here is food. When God's people are fed with Christ, they have a sword in their hands that beats the enemy. God can use our weakest appreciation for Christ to defeat the enemy. As it were, Paul rolls a barley bread into the camp, the church, in Corinth when he says: "Paul was not crucified for you, was he?" (1Cor 1:13). He just wants to say that he and others do not want to function as party leader. He does not participate in party formation and division. He is but a servant. It is about Christ. He humbles himself.

Opposite he places the cross of Christ. What remains of man's pride and own wisdom when he looks at the cross? Paul 'carries' the cross of Christ into the church in Corinth, thus overthrowing the 'tent' of battle, mistrust and division. The effect of every simple truth about Christ served in love is that the 'tent' of anger, quarrel and strife is thrown to the ground.

Verse 15 | Gideon's Response

15 When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands."

Encouragement first of all works worship. With this Gideon gives us a good example. If the Lord has made anything clear to us, He would like us to thank Him first. Only then can we pass on our own experience to others.

This applies in particular to the study of the Bible. What we discover in it of truths and other beautiful things, will awaken our hearts to first thank Him and magnify His Name.

If this does not happen, there is a danger that what He gives and shows will become greater than Himself Who is the Giver. The Giver is always greater than the gift. Except of course the Lord Jesus, the Gift of God. There, Giver and Gift are the same. But everything we have received on the ground of the work of the Lord Jesus, we owe to God. Everything we discover about it, we may thankfully tell Him and then pass it on to others.

Someone once said: “You can only call something your property if you first have given it back to God in thanksgiving.” Daniel has the same attitude as Gideon. Daniel begs God to reveal a matter to him (Dan 2:18). God does so, and the first thing Daniel does is to praise God (Dan 2:19).

After Gideon himself is encouraged and has worshiped, he says to the people that the LORD has already given them the victory. It is remarkable that he says to the people that the LORD has given the enemy into their power, while God has told him that He will give the enemy into his hand (verse 9). What God has personally promised him, he makes a matter for the whole people. The same we have seen in his calling (Jdg 6:12-13).

Verse 16 | Strange Weapons

16 He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers.

The weapons Gideon gives out to his men are not of the kind that can make an impact on the enemy. It is not an army armed to the teeth. Each is given three ‘weapons’: a trumpet, an empty pitcher and a torch that has to be put inside the pitcher. The trumpet used here is the ramshorn. A horn speaks of power and energy and is blown to pass on a message. These trumpets or horns the inhabitants of Jericho have heard day after day as the people moved around the city seven consecutive days (Jos 6:4-20).

The blowing of the trumpet near the enemy speaks of the strong confidence that God will live up to His Word against the enemy. It is to give a testimony that victory is certain. We can let God’s Word speak because

we are convinced of its truth. We can therefore say with Paul: “We also believe, therefore we also speak” (2Cor 4:13).

We also find the pitchers in 2 Corinthians 4. There they are called “earthen vessels” and there is talk about a treasure in them (2Cor 4:7). In the Bible, a vessel sometimes refers to a person or a body (Acts 9:15; 1Thes 4:4; 1Pet 3:7). In 2 Corinthians 4 is the addition that it is an earthen vessel. As a result, the emphasis is placed on its fragility.

Unlike a treasure, which represents something precious, an earthen vessel is of low value. The treasure about which Paul writes to the Corinthians is “the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2Cor 4:6). It may be that Paul, when writing 2 Corinthians 4, thought of Judges 7.

So the weapons of Gideon and his men consist of:

1. a trumpet, which is a picture of the Word of God,
2. an earthen vessel, which is a picture of a weak, fragile body; and
3. a torch, which is a picture of the Light of the glory of God.

In the following verses we see how they are used.

Verses 17-18 | Look at Me and Do Likewise

17 He said to them, “Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. 18 When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”

The real leader is someone who not only says what needs to be done, but who leads the way and shows how to do it. We see this in perfection with the Lord Jesus. He washes the feet of the disciples. Then He says to them: “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (Jn 13:14-15). We can observe this ‘being an example’ throughout the life of the Lord Jesus. He never asked His disciples anything that He Himself did not live up to and in which He Himself did not precede.

We can only motivate others for a particular cause if they can recognize its value in our lives. Another striking case we see with Peter and John. Peter can say to the crippled one who expects something from him and John: "Look at us!" (Acts 3:4). That may seem presumptuous, but it is not. Peter and John have something that can heal the man. They believe in this themselves and bear witness to it in all their lives.

If a Christian cannot say so, it is not right with him. This has nothing to do with pride or self-esteem. Whoever is convinced of the Lord's power and shows it in his life is a living illustration of what he is confessing. His confession is confirmed by his life. It is certainly true that we can fail, but that need not be the daily pattern of someone who wants to live with the Lord.

We too can say this as far as we follow Christ. Paul says: "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1Cor 11:1). This is essentially the content of the battle cry Gideon let call: "For the LORD and for Gideon." He has received the LORD's command and follows Him therein. The others have seen this in Gideon and are following him.

Through his example, Gideon inspires his army to do as he does. This means full obedience to his example. If someone should call something else, or attack the enemy on his own and with his own means, it would mean confusion and defeat. The watchword is: pay close attention to the captain and do precisely what he does and call out what he calls.

Verses 19-20 | The Battle Starts

19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. 20 When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

Shortly after midnight the battle starts. Every warrior has taken the place that Gideon has appointed him. Everything happened in the greatest possible silence. The time of the posting of the watch is used to come to the outskirts of the camp, close to the enemy's army. All the warriors keep an eye on Gideon and the hundred men who are with him.

Then the signal comes. Three hundred trumpets make their sound audible that sounds deafening in the silence of the night. The sound reflects off the mountains and the valley fills up with a swelling trumpet sound. At the same time the pitchers are smashed and around the enemy army three hundred torches become visible. It seems as if there is a large army behind every torch.

From this we can learn how to deal with our (spiritual) enemies. First we see that blowing the trumpet is connected to breaking the pitcher. There is no other way. Testimony cannot be given without renouncing ourselves. Then we see that by breaking the pitcher the light becomes visible. Testimony and darkness do not belong together. Light and testimony belong together. Also in Philippians 2 these two are brought forward together for the purpose of our abode among the people, "among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life" (Phil 2:15-16a). This gives such a great revelation of power, that it overcomes the enemy.

There are four things mentioned in the Gospels that can hinder the shining of light. In Luke 8 two are mentioned. There the Lord Jesus says: "Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed" (Lk 8:16). A container or vessel is the first hindrance to the shining of light. The vessel, as has already been mentioned, represents a person. Here is the hindrance that someone finds himself important. In the history of Gideon we have seen that the vessel or pitcher must be broken. The self-importance must disappear and then the light can shine unhindered. The second hindrance, the bed, speaks of laziness. Whoever takes his ease and does not intend to commit himself to the Lord will spread little light around him.

In Luke 11, two more hindrances are mentioned: "No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket" (Lk 11:33). Here first is mentioned a cellar or hidden place. This points to the hidden sins in our lives, things we secretly do and don't want to show off. As long as we don't confess and forsake them, these things are an obstacle to let our light shine. The second obstacle is the basket, which is a picture of trade, to be busy making money. This can have such an important place in our lives, that it also becomes an obstacle to let our light shine. Anything that prevents the light from shining must be removed from our life (cf. Mt 5:15; Mk 4:21).

The only thing that has to happen to the pitcher is: smash it. Then the light is no longer blocked by anything and it can shine fully. We realize only too well that we ourselves are the greatest blockade to the shining of “the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2Cor 4:6). The torches are held in the left hand. The left hand speaks of weakness. Holding the torch in the left hand suggests that we acknowledge our weakness with which we spread light. Breaking the pitcher is equal to not trusting the flesh. Whoever breaks the pitcher can also blow the trumpet held in his right hand. The right hand speaks of power.

The call of verse 18 “for the LORD and for Gideon” becomes in practice “the sword for the LORD and for Gideon” (verse 20). That is to say, choosing for the Lord and for those who follow Him means acting in obedience to the Word of God. The sword is a picture of the Word that God has given and is visible in the lives of men and women of God. When we say we want to follow the Lord, we can only show it by obeying His Word in everything.

Verses 21-22 | Each in His Place

21 Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. 22 When they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

It is important in the battle that each person takes the place appointed by the Leader. To make clear the importance of this, we can look at a picture that is used in the Bible to characterize the church. It is about the picture of the body. When we think of a body we do not immediately think of battle, but we will see how taking our designated place in the body makes us useful in the spiritual struggle.

In this comparison, every member of the church is a member of the body and therefore has a task to perform in that body that is related to the function of that member. What each member has to do is arranged by the head. In order for the church, seen as a body, to function as a harmonious unity, it is important that each member follows the commands given by the Head, Christ. All members are connected with each other via the Head.

Problems begin when a member is not satisfied with the place God has given it, for He “has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired” (1Cor 12:18). Dissatisfaction because we don’t have a more important place, or pride because we think we don’t need the other members and can do it all by ourselves, make the body as a whole no longer function as a unity. Then we don’t think of the use that another member has of us, but only of ourselves. Both dissatisfaction and pride stem from selfishness. Today, this selfishness is often translated into individualism. Everyone goes his own way and does not care much about the other and about the whole. If ‘I’ just feel good.

Professing Christianity is a hopelessly divided whole. Unfortunately, because of among other things the individualism mentioned, this same division is also increasingly manifesting itself in faith communities where people want to come together and live in accordance with God’s Word. This creates disorder in the ranks. The result is powerlessness in the fight against the enemy. The church has to give up a lot of terrain, because the members do not each continue to take their own place under the direction of the Head.

The solution is not to start structuring everything and to create your own order. There is only one solution and that is to return to the dependence of the Head and obedience to the commands He gives through His Word. Then He takes over the battle and sows confusion among the enemy.

Blowing on the trumpets, breaking the pitchers and making the torches visible have an enormous effect. Midian’s amazing army starts to run, crying, which only increases the noise. The surprise is complete. In the great confusion that has arisen, the Midianites no longer know how they are doing. Every Midianite sees an enemy in his companion. They think they are overwhelmed by a force majeure and fight their way out of the turmoil of battle, without seeing that they have to deal with their own people. This is how the LORD deals with the enemy, because it is His hand who directs this whole event.

Verses 23-24 | Others Involved in the Battle

23 *The men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.* 24 *Gideon sent messengers throughout*

all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were summoned and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.

It is quite conceivable that many of the men who are now being called in and who are going to get involved in the battle are among the 32,000 who have already signed up for the battle. Although they themselves have not had the courage and dedication to enter into the battle before, they can now begin to do their share in completing the work that others have started.

Gideon is not so stubborn as to think he can do it all by himself. At the right time he knows how to motivate others. His actions and those of his 300 men will have been a great encouragement to the others.

Verse 25 | Oreb and Zeeb

25 They captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.

The princes and kings of the hostile peoples have always had a special place in the battle for the land. In particular, they are a picture of the demonic powers that aim to lead the people of God to destruction. They are the leaders and inventors of the strategy with which they exercise their dominion. They impose this strategy on their subjects and order them to implement it. The realm of satan is a well-organized realm. But "we are not ignorant of his schemes" (2Cor 2:11). We do not therefore need to be surprised by his cunning attacks.

The names of the two princes make it clear how he proceeds. Oreb signs 'raven' and Zeeb means 'wolf'. Here we see the two main forms of the evil that occurs in the world. The raven represents the principle of corruption and impurity. The raven is an unclean bird (Lev 11:13,15). The wolf represents the principle of violence, robbing and devouring (Jn 10:10,12). Through these two principles, that of corruption and violence, satan has controlled the world since the Fall (Gen 6:11).

The first sin committed is that of corruption. By the lie of satan believed by Eve (Gen 3:1-7), the image of God and the pure relationship between man and God are corrupted. The second sin is that of violence: Cain kills his brother Abel (Gen 4:1-8). We can classify any form of evil under one of these two categories.

These forms of evil must be stopped in the life of the church. That is to say, they must be judged if they have gained access to and exercise their authority in the church through unfaithfulness. Lying and violence come to an end at a rock and a wine press. In both we see a picture of the cross of the Lord Jesus, where the enemy is defeated.

Judges 8

Introduction

This chapter is also about battle. The battle in the previous chapter goes against an enemy from outside who has gained a foothold in the promised land. The main force has been defeated. The victory has been achieved, but cannot yet be celebrated. There are other types of battle in this chapter. They are the result of jealousy (verses 1-3), of refusal to cooperate (verses 4-17) and of flattery (verses 18-31). How Gideon deals with this, again contains important teaching material for our spiritual warfare. The chapter ends with Gideon's death.

Verse 1 | Jealousy

1 Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they contended with him vigorously.

Ephraim is a jealous tribe. In Isaiah 11 jealousy is given as a special feature of this tribe (Isa 11:13). Their own 'I' is aroused because they are not known in battle. Their self-esteem is affected. In Joshua 17 we already see what is wrong with the Ephraimites: they are not satisfied with their allotted land (Jos 17:14). After all, they are a large tribe and are therefore entitled to a larger piece, they think. They feel themselves the main tribe.

When God is working to keep the believers together, there may just be someone who causes new difficulties. To jealousy it is intolerable that God uses others and passes us by. If someone does something the Lord blesses, instead of a 'praise the Lord!', something will come like 'why didn't you call me?' It comes down to: 'It can't be good because it is done without me.' The 'Ephraimites' are still not extinct.

The spirit of jealousy that characterizes the Ephraimites is certainly not found in Paul. He rejoices in it when Christ is preached, even at his expense (Phil 1:15-18).

Verses 2-3 | Gideon's Gentle Answer

*2 But he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning [of the grapes] of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?
3 God has given the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb into your hands; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.*

The mind of the Ephraimites is revealed precisely by the victory of Gideon. Through the reaction of the Ephraimites, Gideon's mind also becomes public. There is an interaction. When we have gained a victory for and by the Lord, others are put to the test, but so are we ourselves. Did that victory make us important? Gideon does what is written in Philippians 2: "With humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves" (Phil 2:3). This is the means to prevent discord and to maintain unity among the people.

He appeases their anger by praising them. He does not go hard against it, but with gentleness, for "a gentle answer turns away wrath" (Pro 15:1a). Although the Ephraimites were not involved in the real battle, Gideon gives them more honor than himself. They killed more enemies than he did. This what he brings forward. More enemies are killed when the enemy flees than when the battle rages in all its intensity. Gideon makes their share large and important and presents his own share as smaller.

With this attitude and mind he wins his wronged brothers and thus indicates that he is stronger than a strong city. "A brother offended [is harder to be won] than a strong city" (Pro 18:19). We sometimes belittle the service of another person. Jephthah takes a very different approach to this matter and the result is civil war. We get that history in Judges 12.

The Ephraimites leave with the idea that by their efforts the war has been won. It can be a means of preserving peace in the local church by emphasizing certain good qualities or activities of a 'troublesome' brother in the community, without falling into flattery.

It demands of us the mind of humility that is perfectly present in the Lord Jesus. He is our example (Phil 2:1-9). His humiliation was voluntary and total. He always looked for the other person's interest. His example is the most far-reaching of what someone has ever done for another. He came

from heaven to earth, became Man, became Slave, and died the death on the cross. Greater humiliation is inconceivable. And we often have the greatest difficulty with the slightest indulgence to another. This is not about justifying a sin. It's about our attitude toward someone who is difficult to deal with, by which our mind is tested, whether we think we are important.

Verse 4 | Weary Yet Pursuing

4 Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan [and] crossed over, weary yet pursuing.

The 300 men who have hardly taken the time to drink water (Jdg 7:6-7) understand that the time to rest has not yet come. The dedication to the cause of the LORD continues to inspire them. They experience what is written: "He gives strength to the weary, and to [him who] lacks might He increases power" (Isa 40:29). Often the enemy still achieves a partial victory because we stop the battle prematurely because of fatigue. Of course, our powers are limited, but it is important that we have an eye for the ultimate goal of a particular battle. We must not rest until that goal has been achieved.

In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul lists all that he has gone through in his service for the Lord (2Cor 11:16-33). He says of someone else: "Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life" (Phil 2:30). These are people who "did not love their life even when faced with death" (Rev 12:11). People with such an attitude continue, despite their fatigue. Unfortunately, they are scarce.

Verses 5-9 | Refusal to Cooperate

5 He said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." 6 The leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army?" 7 Gideon said, "All right, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." 8 He went up from there to Penuel and spoke sim-

ilarly to them; and the men of Penuel answered him just as the men of Succoth had answered. 9 So he spoke also to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I return safely, I will tear down this tower."

After the dispute with Ephraim had been settled by Gideon's meek conduct, he is faced with a new dispute. The dispute with Ephraim was about the share in the battle. The dispute that is now arising concerns those who do not want to participate in the fight. It is not even about active participation, but only about supporting those who are active in the deliverance of the people. Gideon is entitled to their sympathy and support.

The inhabitants of Succoth, which lies on the territory of the tribe of Gad, calculate that 300 tired men will never be able to win over 15,000 experienced fighters. These will of course regroup after Israel's first surprise attack. Gideon must first prove that he can really capture the kings of the enemy. In that half-hearted, hesitant and finally rejecting attitude they stand. They first want to see the results.

What they overlook, is the only thing that matters: Is the LORD with the 300 weary men or not? They characterize the people who first have to see and only then believe. They first want a tangible result and only then intend to share. It is about the things one sees. This is the spirit of the world and unbelief. Here is a whole city refusing any fellowship with the fighters for God. Such a thing can have a very discouraging effect on anyone who wants to work for the Lord. These people still think too much of the power of the enemy and obstruct all kinds of things for those who devote themselves to the cause of God.

Paul has also had the experience that all leave him, but he reacts differently from Gideon. He says: "May it not be counted against them" (2Tim 4:16). This does not mean that Gideon is reacting wrongly. Having bread and not giving it, while it is necessary because of the progress of the testimony, asks for retribution. Those who take a stand against the work of God will not escape their just punishment, even if it is not yet time for it, because the battle demands all the attention.

Penuel adopts the same attitude as Succoth and will therefore share in the same fate. Penuel means 'face of God'. This city recalls Jacob's wrestling with God that took place there some 500 years earlier – in Genesis 32 this

place is called Peniel, with the same meaning (Gen 32:22-32). There Jacob was touched at the socket of his thigh, making him constantly aware that his weakness gives God opportunity to show His strength. The inhabitants have forgotten that lesson. Just like Succoth, they look at what is in front of them and calculate with human factors. The punishments announced by Gideon come to our attention in verses 16-17.

Verses 10-12 | The Remainder Is Beaten

10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their armies with them, about 15,000 men, all who were left of the entire army of the sons of the east; for the fallen were 120,000 swordsmen. 11 Gideon went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the camp when the camp was unsuspecting. 12 When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army.

The main goal Gideon wants to achieve by chasing the remainder of the Midianites is to capture and eliminate both kings. Without the authority and strategy of these kings, the army of the Midianites is rudderless. These kings did not get involved in the battle themselves, but were in the background. From this position they passed on their orders to the warriors. These kings represent evil powers in the heavenly places, which also operate in the background and pass on their orders to the visible world and exert their influence on it. The leaders we met in Judges 7 (Jdg 7:25) represent persons by whom the evil powers exercise their authority.

In the meaning of the names of these kings their character is clearly expressed. Zebah means ‘a religious sacrifice’ or ‘a victim to sacrifice’. Zalmunna means ‘a forbidden shadow’ or ‘a spiritual shadow of death’. That there are two kings says something of the diversity of evil within the sphere of authority of satan who is called “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). Zebah does not represent a sacrifice to God, but the massacre that satan without mercy wants to inflict upon God’s people. Zalmunna characterizes the atmosphere in which this takes place.

If we want to be free or unbound, we must not allow these enemies to influence our life. Strife – this is as we have seen the meaning of the name

Midian – is an enemy that is also today making countless victims among God's people. The terrain and the atmosphere in which strife takes place is the shadow of death. Strife does not bring life, but sows death and destruction. It is not for nothing that these two kings are located in the city of Karkor, which means 'city of destruction'. Isn't that an appropriate name? There is another aspect to this victory that is important to point out. The victory over Midian is a foreshadowing of the final victory Israel will achieve over its enemies in the future (Psa 83:4-12; Isa 9:3-4).

Verses 13-17 | The Repayment

13 Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. 14 And he captured a youth from Succoth and questioned him. Then [the youth] wrote down for him the princes of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. 15 He came to the men of Succoth and said, "Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are weary?'" 16 He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them. 17 He tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

Before he deals with the captured kings, Gideon will first fulfill his vows to Succoth and Penuel. These two cities have not only taken a neutral stance in the battle, but they have also refused to unite with the warriors for God and have withheld the necessary support. This means that in a practical sense they have chosen the side of the enemy. Whoever withhold from God's people the means by which they would receive strength for battle, while those means are available, is playing into the hands of the enemy. The latter then has to deal with a weakened opponent.

Gideon's indignation is therefore justified. In order to be able to express it in a good way, he uses a young man from Succoth whom he has captured. He lets him write down the names of the people he considers responsible for the attitude of the city. When he arrives at the city, he reminds them of their attitude and scornful remarks, pointing to the captured kings. They must have been ashamed. Now they must bow to the announced discipline.

Gideon chastises them because they behaved kindly toward the enemy at a time when the servants of God are tired and yet continued the pursuit. Thorns and thistles will make their sharp stimuli feel and remind them for a long time how half-hearted they behaved in the day of decision. It is a sensitive lesson. The thorns and thistles as means of discipline represent the distress, disappointments and sufferings necessary to repent those who have been half-hearted in their confession of the Lord Jesus and to make them realize that they have gone astray in connection with the cause of God.

In Penuel, the city with the tower that probably gives the city an important appearance, he demolishes the tower and kills the men. As with Succoth, the judgment is carried out here to those who could have participated in the battle against the enemy by at least encouraging the men of Gideon in their pursuit. Their arrangement is the result of purely human calculation. Such thoughts are strongholds raised up against the knowledge of God and that must be broken down.

The tower of Penuel seems to represent human thought and judgment, of having trust in themselves. There should be no room for this (2Cor 10:4-5). The first tower mentioned in the Bible is mentioned in Genesis 11. Why this tower is being built, is told: "Let us make for ourselves a name" (Gen 11:4). The tower serves to glorify man. Whoever owns and honors such a tower will always keep his distance from the battle in which faith is involved. But he who contends for the faith (Jude 1:3), breaks down that tower.

Verses 18-21 | Zebah and Zalmuna Are Killed

18 Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men [were] they whom you killed at Tabor?" And they said, "They were like you, each one resembling the son of a king." 19 He said, "They [were] my brothers, the sons of my mother. [As] the LORD lives, if only you had let them live, I would not kill you." 20 So he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them." But the youth did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. 21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise up yourself, and fall on us; for as the man, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks.

The victory has been achieved, but it still has to be completed. The dangers have not yet definitively disappeared. The danger lies in the tail. After the victory, a subtle danger comes to light. That danger is the use of flattery. The first time it comes out of the mouth of the enemy. After the sword of the enemy Gideon now has to deal with his mouth. The victory may have made Gideon a little self-confident. At least he seems to lose some of his dependence on the LORD.

Why does he start a conversation with his enemies? After all, it is clear that they have to be killed, isn't it? He wants to call them to account for the murder of his brothers. But by talking to them, he opens up to their influence. It is exactly the same as with Eve, who also enters into conversation with the serpent, the devil, so that she comes under his influence. It has become fatal to her and the whole human family.

Now that their power has been broken, the two kings are trying to take in Gideon with flattery. Although he is not impressed by their flattery, he does not seem to be able to escape its influence completely. He loses the real understanding of the enemy's power and says to his son to kill them. This is different from what we read in Joshua 10, where Joshua captured five kings. The order to put their feet on the necks of these kings Joshua does not give to young people, but to "the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him". Then Joshua kills them himself (Jos 10:22-27).

It is unlikely that the boy belonged to the 300 men. The young boy is afraid, and all those who had shown fear had already left before the battle began. Gideon overestimates the power of his son. This is a lesson for all parents – and leaders – who note with a certain satisfaction, that their natural or spiritual children participate in the spiritual warfare. They must not allow themselves to be led astray to ask of them things that exceed their spiritual strength. Often these are situations in which the power of the enemy is underestimated.

After this 'defeat' of Gideon, the enemy once again flatters, this time with challenging words. Their expression has to do with the honor they want to keep to themselves. They would rather die by the hand of the leader than by the hand of a boy. This time Gideon takes full responsibility and kills both kings.

However, he takes something of them with him as a kind of spoils of war, a trophy, as a memory of the victory. It is possible that the crescent ornaments he takes from the camels of the kings indicate that these Midianites were worshippers of the moon god. What Gideon does is a symptom that indicates that he does not give all honor to God. He wants to keep a memory of the victory he has won.

We do not read from any of the other God-given judges that they have done anything like this. Only Samson goes one step further. With him we don't see that he takes something from the enemy, but someone. That person makes sure that he fails in his service and eventually falls down. With Gideon it doesn't go that far, but it seems the germ has been laid here for his coming failure.

Verses 22-23 | Escaping a Snare

*22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son's son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian."
23 But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you."*

The next flattery that Gideon has to face doesn't come from the side of the world, but from the side of God's people. The people want a visible leader, as do the nations. What God warns about in Judges 7 (Jdg 7:2) is going to happen here. They attribute victory to a man. They give Gideon the honor only due to God. They also want to secure the kingship through succession. After all, you never know who and how the next judge will be. Successive kingship offers certainty. It all seems so plausible, but it indicates that the people have lost their real dependence on God.

In professing Christianity there is a lot of talk about leadership. Its importance is always stressed. Without clear leadership, it is said that God's people are not doing well. Much of such talk in reality indicates that one does not know how to deal with the leadership of the Lord Jesus that He exercises through the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that there are no brothers with the gift of government or who function as pastors, or overseers, or elders. But in God's people there is often no longer the spiritual condition to recognize such people and also to recognize them according

to the spiritual characteristics indicated in Scripture. What happens then is that such people are appointed or openly indicated, or whatever one wants to call it. In any case, they want to be able to hear and see clearly who the leaders are.

In many cases the seed is sown for the difference between the clergy and the laity. What Israel is asking for is comparable to the introduction of a clergy. The servant is magnified and God is forgotten. Later Israel will repeat this question (1Sam 8:1-6). Then they will get a king in Saul (1Sam 10:17-24), after which God comes with the man after His heart: David (1Sam 16:1-13).

Fortunately, Gideon sees through the danger of the request. He refuses to become king and reminds the people of God as their King. That should also be our answer when there are remarks to appoint someone or a few in the position of leader. A leader to God's mind will reject any appointment by people.

Paul gives a good description of his apostleship. As an apostle he is a great leader, but his whole apostleship is separate from man, so he can say that he is an apostle "not [sent] from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:1). This means that the origin, the source of his apostleship, is not in man and that he has not been appointed by a man in this apostleship.

Verses 24-27 | The Ephod

24 Yet Gideon said to them, "I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil." (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25 They said, "We will surely give [them]." So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. 26 The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 [shekels] of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which [were] on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that [were] on their camels' necks. 27 Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household.

What Gideon asks now does not come from others, but this desire springs from his own heart. He had hardly spoken the words by which he refused the kingship, or he stretched out his hand to the priesthood. He asked the whole people for a contribution for the production of an ephod. The ephod is a clothing piece that is only worn by the high priest or priests. Therefore it is not for Gideon to make this ephod.

He could have defended his request by referring to the sacrifice he made and the altar he erected in Ophrah (Jdg 6:19,24). There he did something like a priestly service, didn't he? But the altar he built there did not have a mediating character. It did not serve to approach God on behalf of the people.

The ephod he wants to make must become a memorial of his victory. That is why he asks the whole people to give something for this. Aren't we doing it all sometimes: making or hanging a memento of the victory the Lord has given us? It may be that we like to tell about our victories, the blessing the Lord has wanted to give through our service, of course everything under the covering that it is to the Lord's honor. But isn't it true, that they are essentially trophies that we 'hang up' for ourselves? Aren't we the celebrated instruments? Something like that becomes a snare.

The people are immediately ready to make this contribution. If a person is allowed to contribute something to make a memorial for a victory, he likes to participate. For example, at the place where there was first a statue for Baal that was overthrown by Gideon, now a statue for God is placed by Gideon.

But the effect is the same: idolatry or playing the harlot. It is considered to be a means of approaching God through it. Because the ephod is not in connection with the high priest who has to carry it, and it is therefore only a form, it becomes a means of idolatry. At the same time idolatry is harlotry, because it denies the connection with God and establishes a connection with the idols, that is to say, the demons.

Everything that is loosened from Christ in professing Christianity becomes a means of idolatry. The form replaces the being. We see this when it is said that someone receives new life through baptism. The same is said of the Supper of the Lord. There is also kneeling before a crucifix. Such

results can be expected in a religion when one acts on the basis of religious feelings rather than being guided by what God has said in His Word about serving and worshipping Him “in the Spirit of God” (Phil 3:3).

It is not only a snare to Gideon, but also to his household. He drags his whole household into this idolatry. This shows the seriousness of the words that have once been spoken: “The way away from God you never go alone.”

Verses 28-31 | Gideon’s Further Life

28 So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon. 29 Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. 30 Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives. 31 His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech.

After we have heard all about the battle and the events that resulted directly from it, we come to the final conclusion in verse 28. Midian has been defeated and the land has rest for forty years under the leadership of Gideon.

But that is not the end of Gideon’s history. It seems that when the days of his fighting for God are over, he has made himself easy and has begun to give in to the lusts of the flesh. Not for nothing does the Christian hear the warning that after a victory he should not rest on his laurels. He must take up the full armor of God, not only during the day of the struggle, but also “having done everything, to stand firm” (Eph 6:13).

Unfortunately, the rest of Gideon’s life is a telling example that he has not taken this into account. He quietly retreats into his home, takes many wives and therefore has numerous offspring. On the one hand, this is a proof of prosperity. As one’s prosperity and influence grew at that time, so did one’s harem. King Ahab had seventy sons (2Kgs 10:1) and some of Gideon’s successors also had many sons (Jdg 10:4; 12:9,14). On the other hand, the hatred and murder entering Gideon’s family are precisely characteristics for these Old Testament situations of polygamy. Having more than one wife goes against God’s order of creation and gives a lot of misery.

In that period Gideon also gets a son with his concubine from Shechem whom he names Abimelech. Of all Gideon's sons this is the only one whose name is mentioned here. This is not for nothing. The next chapter, a long chapter, will show the character of this man and what a source of misery he is. We will see in his history that the laziness and pleasure in Gideon's life gives life to a source from which evil originates.

It is telling that Abimelech's mother does not live in Ophra, but somewhere else. Gideon wants, so to speak, the lusts, but not the burdens. Even more significant is the meaning of the name he gives to this child. Abimelech literally means 'my father is king'. This is a name that also Philistine princes have (Gen 20:2; 21:22; 26:1). That Gideon gives this name to his son shows something of what may have been hidden in his heart. It is not inconceivable that the flattery of verses 18 and 22 has had an influence.

Those who know something of their own heart know how easily certain flattery can take root in their thinking. It can stay with you and 'underground' the idea that you are someone of significance, someone whom others look up to, can still play a role. On certain occasions, this thought can no longer be suppressed and comes to the fore. Then the own importance will assert itself and the Lord will no longer be number One.

Only by radically judging such thoughts and keeping them in 'death' it is possible to keep from them playing an active role again. Whoever radically judges such thoughts puts into practice what Colossians 3 calls for: "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry" (Col 3:5). Is the desire to be important not an evil desire? Is it not a form of greed to want to take a position that only God is entitled to? It is nothing but idolatry. This is why we have to deal with such things. This can be replaced by "a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col 3:12).

The thought of being important not only must be judged, but must be considered to be dead. This can be done by putting into practice what Romans 6 says: "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11) Here we have the key in our hands to kill arrogant thoughts, for that is what they are, and not allow them to rise again.

The basis for such an attitude toward pride lies in what the Lord Jesus did on the cross. This is the subject of the verses preceding Romans 6:11 (Rom 6:1-10). This is why it is so important to make a fundamental study of the letter to the Romans in particular. We then gain insight into who we ourselves are by nature, into what God in Christ has done to us, and how as a result we may see ourselves before God. This gives us the right weapons to deprive sin of any authority over us.

Verses 32-35 | Gideon's End and Thereafter

32 And Gideon the son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. 33 Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god. 34 Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; 35 nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal ([that is], Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.

The end of Gideon is a testimony of the Spirit about who he has been before God. Of him, and further only of Samson, is said in this book that he “was buried in the tomb of his father”. It is further reported of him that he died “at a ripe old age”. This is also said in the Old Testament of Abraham (Gen 15:15; 25:8) and of David (1Chr 29:28).

Unfortunately, the Israelites do not follow the good that has been seen in Gideon's life, but the bad that has also been present in his life. By making the ephod he has brought the people back to the path of idolatry. By this he has ruined his own work (Jdg 6:25-27) and has laid the seed for a renewed deviation of the people from the LORD.

The Israelites “again played the harlot with the Baals”. More than forty years after Gideon demolished the altar of Baal, the Israelites choose Baal-berith as their god. Baal-berith means ‘lord of the covenant’. The worship of Baal is a sign of a covenant with the Canaanites, something which God has explicitly forbidden. God is forgotten and no thought is given to the good that Gideon has done for the people.

Despite the fact that Gideon participated in this development, God holds the people responsible for their own behavior. He reproaches them for being ungrateful for what Gideon did.

Ungratefulness is also a characteristic of our days. How do we deal with brothers who have served us and who, by preaching God's Word, have made the Lord Jesus more precious to us, so that we worship Him more? In addition, their service has increased our desire to obey God's Word, so that we have begun to serve Him with greater dedication. We must be thankful to those who, through their preaching and life, have brought Christ closer to us and brought us closer to Christ. About such people we read for example in Romans 16 and in Hebrews 13 (Rom 16:3-4; Heb 13:7,17).

Judges 9

Introduction

This chapter is a sequel to the last verses of the previous chapter. There mention is made of a renewed deviation from the LORD. Here we read about a further leaving Him. The result is slavery and humiliation. Here, however, slavery is not the result of hostile power from the outside, but from the inside. The previous lessons are about the attitude of the people toward their enemies. The lesson we see in the history of Abimelech has to do with the relationships within the people of God.

In Abimelech we meet someone who, instead of fighting the enemies, rules over God's people. The longest chapter of this book is dedicated to him and his behavior, a chapter of no less than fifty-seven verses. Abimelech is not a deliverer of Israel, but someone who represent a principle that we also see in the case of a certain Diotrephes. Diotrephes is mentioned in the third letter of John. He is the one "who loves to be first among them" (3Jn 1:9). He is one who presumes authority, to the exclusion of others, as John further says of him: "He does not accept what we say." He does not tolerate competition.

This practice is illustrated in Abimelech. What is striking is that he does not mention the name of God one time. He is also one of those dark figures who in the Old Testament are a foreshadowing of the man of sin, the anti-christ. This is something we should also think about when we are dealing with his history.

Most importantly, however, is that he shows something of what is present in the heart of each of us. To be the first, the most important one, is in the blood of all of us. What we need is to look at the Lord Jesus Who has emptied Himself and became the Servant of all. He Who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).

He has not only said it, but also done it. Therefore He can say to His disciples, if they argue about who of them should be the greatest (so it was in them as well): "But [it is] not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader

like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines [at the table] or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines [at the table]? But I am among you as the one who serves" (Lk 22:26-27). When thinking about Abimelech's performance, let us always pay attention to the contrast with the performance of our Savior.

Verses 1-6 | Seizure of Power

1 And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying, 2 "Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?' Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh." 3 And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our relative." 4 They gave him seventy [pieces] of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him. 5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself. 6 All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.

From Abimelech we do not read that he is called judge. Nor is he raised up by God to deliver Israel. Perhaps because of the meaning of his name – his name means 'my father is king' – he got the idea of claiming dominion on the basis of succession. His father was the leader of the people, he would be too. In any case, he comes to claim what his father has refused (Jdg 8:22-23) and thus starts "lording" over God's people (cf. 1Pet 5:3). He is the one Paul speaks of when he says to the elders of the church in Ephesus: "From among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

He is a Diotrophes. Abimelech is the type of people who run the church as managers run their business. Such a person will always try to gather people around him in order to realize his ideas about being a church and to implement changings. He will do this by giving favors, by which one

feels obliged to him. His recruitment campaign is running well and his language is popular.

Abimelech acts as if he wants to stand up for the interests of his family and cleverly connects to their feelings, while pushing aside his seventy half-brothers. He does not present himself as the son of Gideon, but takes on the character of his mother. Gideon undoubtedly raised his seventy sons in his own home, while Abimelech grew up in Shechem.

With Abimelech there is no respect for his half-brothers. Once he is chosen, he kills them. For this he pays per person a silver piece to unworthy people who capture and control the entire club of seventy men, while Abimelech kills them one by one on one stone. Perhaps this was the stone Joshua set up in Shechem as a witness against the people (Jos 24:25-27). The fact that the money comes from the idol temple does not bother him at all.

Abimelech wants to exalt himself and resembles the person described in Daniel 11 (Dan 11:36). Reference has already been made to the agreement between Abimelech and the antichrist. The characteristics of the antichrist are described, among other places, in 1 John 2, 1 John 4 and 2 Thessalonians 2 (1Jn 2:22; 4:3; 2Thes 2:3-4). The antichrist works as Abimelech does. He too will be able to win the favor of the people with soothing words (Psa 55:21; Dan 11:32). In Absalom, a son of David, we also find this characteristic, the use of flattery. We read of him: "So Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel" (2Sam 15:6). This is what Abimelech does here.

One man escaped the massacre (cf. 2Chr 22:10-12). That's Jotham. His name means "the LORD is perfect". He is a true witness to his name. God will never be without a witness. Jotham gives his testimony in the following verses. He is a true Antipas (Rev 2:13), which means 'one against all'. He represents the faithful remnant that God preserves in all times according to His gracious choice (Rom 11:5).

Abimelech is the first person to be declared king in Israel. He completely disregards the demands of God, which He has had written down in the law for this ministry (Deu 17:14-20). Ironically, the celebration takes place near the tree by Shechem where Joshua wrote the words of the covenant in the book of God (Jos 24:26).

Verse 7 | Where and Why Jotham Speaks

7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, "Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you."

When Jotham is informed that Abimelech has been proclaimed king, he does not sit on his hands. He goes to Mount Gerizim, the mountain of blessing (Deu 27:12). With this he indicates that he is looking for blessing for the people. For this he wants to be used by God and thus fulfill the task God has given him. Whoever escapes judgment by the grace of God, such as Jotham, is a suitable instrument to be used as a blessing for those who have turned away from God.

Jotham does not simply announce the judgment. What he has to say is of great significance. He does not speak in riddles. Everyone understands properly what he is talking about. He presents the way of blessing and shows what the consequences are if one does not want to go that way. Anyone who listens to him, acknowledging the truth of his words and acts accordingly, finds an open way to God and will also notice an open ear with Him. Thus stands the loner who wants to be a blessing for the whole people. The parable of Jotham contains the secret to be heard by God.

Verses 8-9 | The Olive Tree

8 Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' 9 But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?'

What Jotham wants to make clear with his parable is that to rule over others is to spoil the blessing God wants to give. Where people are given the opportunity to rule, the use and blessing of the Holy Spirit (represented in the olive tree), righteousness (represented in the fig tree) and joy (represented in the vine), all gifts of God, are corrupted. The final result of rule can be seen in the bramble which will cause nothing but pain. Here is shown what human government in the house of God ends in.

The tree here is a picture of a reigning power. We can also see this for example with Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:20-22). With the trees it is always about bearing fruit and giving it up when to rule is started. By nature, peo-

ple want to be governed by someone in whose life fruit is seen. The true spirit of government is the spirit of serving (Lk 22:27). Exercising authority in the sense of lording is of much less value than fruitful serving.

In the story of the trees, Jotham exposes the character of Abimelech and also the unfair and disingenuous actions of the citizens of Shechem against the remembrance of his father Gideon. We will see that we can apply Jotham's story to leadership in individuals, but also to the overemphasis of a particular doctrine. The purpose of the parable is to recognize the guidance of God and to avoid having ourselves appointed in such a position by others who want to give us a place of honor.

The olive tree is the first tree to speak. He is a picture of the energy and enlightenment, power and fruit of the Holy Spirit. Olive oil kept the candlestick in the tabernacle burning so that there was light (Exo 27:20). We also read that in the Old Testament priests and kings and occasionally prophets are anointed with oil. In the New Testament the believers are seen as priests and kings (Rev 1:6) and the believers are spoken of as people anointed not with literal oil, but with the Holy Spirit (1Jn 2:20,27). Oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit.

If the work of the Holy Spirit is clearly visible in one's life, there is a good chance that people will ask him to take the lead. It may also happen in a community of faith that the working and expression of the Holy Spirit is emphasized in such a way that with it His true place is lost. Then the gifts of the Spirit become the yardstick for judging one's spiritual life. A person who has a certain gift then enjoys a higher regard than someone who does not have the gift in question.

Whoever examines the Bible in this respect will discover that the Holy Spirit did not come to present Himself, but that He has come to glorify the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus says of the Holy Spirit: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose [it] to you" (Jn 16:13-14).

This does not diminish the glory and Divinity of the Holy Spirit. It is about determining the place of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead and what He does

on earth. By the way: therefore also speaking to and worshiping of the Holy Spirit in word and song and praying to Him are misplaced. Nowhere in the Bible this is justified.

What can become visible in one's life is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23a). If such a person, with whom this is found, is asked to take the lead, the answer will be: I am too busy in the things of God to start to rule.

The olive tree also has to do with the promises God has given to His people (Rom 11:16-24). It also presents the believers as those who are connected with God in everything and who realize that they owe everything to Him (Psa 52:9).

In summary, an 'olive tree brother' is someone who is guided by the Holy Spirit and in whom the fruit of the Spirit becomes visible. He is one who takes into account the promises of God and in all things trusts Him. If there is an 'olive tree brother' in the local church, he could be told: 'We want to appoint you as a leader, as happens in the churches around us.' It is to be hoped that his answer will be like that of the olive tree, so that he can continue to bear fruit to the glory of God.

Verses 10-11 | The Fig Tree

10 Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come, reign over us!' 11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?'

The first time we read about the fig tree is when Adam and Eve have sinned (Gen 3:7). After sinning and seeing that they are naked, they want to cover their nakedness with leaves of the fig tree. Herein lies an indication that the fig tree, in picture, says something about righteousness. Adam and Eve make their own covering to be able to appear before God. But that covering does not work.

It is like with all works of one's own righteousness, by which a man thinks he can be pleasing to God. It is a righteousness without fruit for God. They are only leaves, it is an external matter. This is also the case in Mark 11 (Mk 11:13-14). The Lord Jesus is hungry and wants to eat from a fig tree. However, it only has leaves and not fruit. The Lord then curses that fig tree.

The fig tree is a picture of Israel (Hos 9:10a; Joel 1:7). God came to His people in Christ to seek fruit with them. He longed for that. But what did He find? A people that was completely controlled by a self-built righteousness. But never will anything of personal effort make man pleasant to God. When the Lord Jesus was brought to the cross and killed by this people in their own righteousness, it became abundantly clear that man's doings are sinful through and through.

God is only interested in the fruit of righteousness, not in an appearance of righteousness. This fruit certainly becomes visible, but only if it is the result of a love that abounds in real knowledge and all discernment and is worked out in practical life of faith with an eye on the coming of Christ (Phil 1:9-10). Someone with whom this is found is "filled with the fruit of righteousness which [comes] through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil 1:11).

The fig tree speaks of food, and also of healing. In Isaiah 38 there is talk of a cake of figs which had to be applied to the boil of Hezekiah (Isa 38:21). Thereby he would be recovered.

We can learn the following from all this. In the church especially the shepherd and the teacher have a service of nourishment and refreshment, healing and support for the members of the people of God. Their service will be aimed at letting the fruit of righteousness in the faithful grow and blossom, so that God can enjoy it.

What these 'fig tree brothers' must be careful of is that they do not exchange this service for a place of dominion over God's people. It also means a warning that the practical experience of faith should not be over-emphasized. This happens where the emphasis is on being a Christian practically, while ignoring what the Bible says about it. Then the fig tree also waves over the other trees.

Verses 12-13 | The Vine

12 Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!' 13 But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?'

The next one is the vine. When the vine, or the wine, is mentioned in the Bible, it represents joy, gladness. We read this in verse 13, where wine is said to “cheer God and men”. This thought is expressed in Psalm 104: “And wine which makes man’s heart glad” (Psa 104:15a). Israel is compared to a vineyard (Isa 5:1-7). God wanted a people with whom He could experience joy and gladness: “For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah His delightful plant” (Isa 5:7a). Unfortunately, it must follow: “Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress” (Isa 5:7b). Israel did not bring Him the joy He counted on and did everything for.

The Lord Jesus tells in John 15, where He is seen as the true vine (Jn 15:1), how we can bear fruit to the glorification and joy of the Father. In a word, what He says comes down to obedience. He says it this way: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and [that] your joy may be made full” (Jn 15:10-11).

In the life of a ‘vine brother’ obedience becomes visible with as a sequence joy for the Father and for himself. He does not want to change the obedience to God and the joy it gives him for a position of dominion over the people of God. In the meetings of the church the joy can also be emphasized too much. This can happen as a reaction to the gloominess that sometimes prevails in the meetings. That gloominess is not good. There can be joy about everything God has given us.

It is about a balance between, on the one hand, the awareness of who we are by nature and that the Lord Jesus had to suffer for this and, on the other hand, the great gratitude and joy for what the Lord Jesus did and the results in which we may share. In practice, emphasizing joy too much blurs real joy into having a ‘good’ feeling, and distances oneself further and further from what really makes the heart of God happy.

The latter is what it is all about. The heart of God is made happy by everything we tell Him about the Lord Jesus, about His work on the cross, and how He has glorified God in everything. The heart of God rejoices in everything He sees in our lives from the Lord Jesus, from the obedient and devotional life of His Son.

Verses 14-15 | The Bramble

14 Finally all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come, reign over us!' 15 The bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.'

Then the 'real' ruler comes forward. The trees that are on their way to anoint a king over them (verse 8) have in vain appealed to the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine. And, very curiously, the result is not that they wonder if they are doing a good job, but they continue their search. They don't go back to their own place to bear their own fruit. They are discontented with their place in the forest and remain so. If none of the real candidates is prepared to become king, they will just ask someone they did not initially think of, but who certainly wants to rule.

In verse 14 we read something that is not mentioned the other times, namely that the request comes from "all the trees". It seems as if all the rejections have only strengthened the craving for a leader. They must and will have someone who rules over them. This is an ideal starting point for the bramble or thorn bush.

A bramble appeals to the imagination of anyone who has ever come into contact with it. You can only expect pain from a bramble. The bramble or thorn bush does not talk about fruit, but about shade – as if a bramble or thornbush can provide protection against the burning sun – and fire. If you lie under a bramble, you can only get scratches and pain.

Thorns are a direct consequence of sin (Gen 3:18). Those who resort to sinful means to satisfy their own desires can only expect destruction. The bramble or thorn bush represents the curse as a result of the sin that takes shape in a man who seeks himself. A compromise is not possible. It is bending or perishing. This is proven in the rest of this chapter. Whoever wants to be of importance among the brethren only proves that he is a bramble.

Verses 16-20 | The Explanation of the Parable

16 "Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved— 17 for my father fought for you and risked his

life and delivered you from the hand of Midian; 18 but you have risen against my father's house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative— 19 if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. 20 But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech."

From the safe height of Mount Gerizim, Jotham starts to explain the parable to his audience. The reverberation between the mountains makes him clearly understandable to everyone. What he says must make a powerful impression on the consciences of the hearers (verse 16) who are in the valley below him. He reminds them of the favors that were bestowed on them in the past by his father Gideon (verse 17) and mentions their great ingratitude (verse 18). Then he emphasizes the result of their rebellion (verse 20).

In his explanation Jotham draws the contrast between Gideon and Abimelech. He describes the worthlessness of Abimelech, who the men of Shechem willingly accepted as king over themselves. He also accuses them of shameless treatment of his father's house, to whom they owe so much. Such injustice cannot go unpunished. They will eat the fruit of their own actions. The covenant between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem will end in a battle in which they will exterminate each other. In verse 20 Jotham says who is meant by the bramble: Abimelech.

The contrast with his father Gideon is also expressed here, that Gideon refused the kingship, just like the good trees. The kingship of Abimelech will mean the destruction of the people and of themselves. Here too we see a contrast with Gideon, of whom Jotham says: "My father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian" (verse 17). Gideon has risked his life, literally it says 'has thrown away his life'. This shows the full commitment of Gideon to deliver the people of God. In this he resembles the Lord Jesus, Who not only risked His life, but gave it to save us.

Abimelech resembles the devil, who comes to steal, to kill and to destroy, as the Lord Jesus says: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;

I came that they may have life, and have [it] abundantly. “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep”” (Jn 10:10-11). In the first (the thief) we recognize Abimelech, in the second (the good shepherd) Gideon.

Verse 21 | Jotham Flees

21 Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother.

After this short, but telling speech Jotham flees, perhaps because people from Shechem want to climb the mountain to seize him. He ends up in Beer, which means ‘source’. A source is a good hiding place. At a source is living water, you can constantly refresh yourself there. At the same time, the source forms a protection against the enemy. Jotham goes to live there for fear of his brother.

For us, too, there is such a source of refreshment and protection. This source is the Word of God. If we, like Jotham, have pointed out wrong things to the people of God and we meet enmity, then our only refreshment and security is to be found in the Word of God.

In Numbers 21 the name Beer is also mentioned (Num 21:16-18). There we do not find a single person, which is a characteristic of a time of decay and general unfaithfulness, but there we see the whole people. What are they doing there? Sing. There we have a wonderful result of being at the source. The faithful witnesses retreat to the source where there is living water and sing songs and hymns to the glory of God and the Lord Jesus.

Verses 22-25 | God Is Going to Repay

22 Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. 23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, 24 so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. 25 The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech.

There is a saying that reads: God's mills grind slowly, but surely. Sometimes it seems that God does nothing with what He has said. Also in 2 Peter 3 we have such a situation (2Pet 3:3-10). Has not the Lord Jesus said that He will come soon? He has still not come. But what is a thousand years for the eternal God? Well, in the case of Abimelech, three years have passed. But what is three years for the eternal God? He really hasn't forgotten what He said through Jotham.

It may take a long time, but there will come a time when God's Word is fulfilled. Sin is overtaken by Him. After Abimelech ruled Shechem for three years, God sends an evil spirit. This drives a wedge of unfaithfulness between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem. God sometimes makes use of an evil spirit to achieve His desired goal (1Sam 16:14; 1Kgs 22:19-23). The word translated with 'ruled' in verse 22 appears in the book of Judges only here and is probably chosen to distinguish Abimelech's bad, self-perpetuating government from that of the faithful judges.

God's judgment comes both on Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem. We see how God judges the matter. He makes the judgment come on Abimelech because he is the murderer of his brothers and on the citizens of Shechem because they are complicit in it. God considers the citizens of Shechem no less guilty. They have supported Abimelech. This shows how evil it is for God to support someone who is doing wrong things, even though the supporter himself is not actively involved.

It seems that Abimelech no longer lives in Shechem. This is probably evident from the fact that he has a lieutenant or ruler, Zebul (verses 28,30), who looks after his affairs. He has achieved his goal and no longer needs the citizens of Shechem. His personal involvement, with which he won their favor in the beginning of this chapter, has disappeared. In turn, the men of Shechem become unfaithful to him. This deceitful act of Shechem is transmitted by an unfaithful man of Shechem to Abimelech. It is a chain of betrayal, lies and deception.

Verses 26-29 | Gaal

26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him. 27 They went out

into the field and gathered [the grapes] of their vineyards and trod [them], and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech. 28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and [is] Zebul [not] his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? 29 Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." And he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out."

A new player appears on stage. His name is Gaal, which means 'disgust', 'aversion'. He is the son of Ebed which means 'slavery', 'service'. He makes clever use of the power vacuum that has arisen and responds to the negative feelings that the citizens of Shechem have for Abimelech. It increases the gap between the two parties even further.

The opportunity he uses is a harvest feast, when everyone is in the best mood and therefore easy to influence. In so doing, he appeals to their national feelings. Abimelech has appealed to their family connection with him, but Gaal goes back to the distant ancestry. He shows them the common roots. This appeals to the citizens of Shechem. In this way he sows the seed of dissatisfaction with their current king and notices how easily his words can bring about a turnaround among the people. His tactics seem to have succeeded.

After these preparatory actions he seizes power and presents himself as the better leader. He ridicules Abimelech, and those who agree with Abimelech first turn against him now. It is that easy to change the popular favor. One carnal leader is exchanged for another. But Gaal only talks. We see that in the rest of history.

Verses 30-33 | Zebul

30 When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned. 31 He sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you. 32 Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. 33 In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold,

when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can."

As with all cleverly designed plans that serve to promote himself, here too we find elements that have not been taken into account. Gaal has misjudged himself as far as Zebul is concerned. The latter remains loyal to Abimelech and has a message sent to Abimelech containing at the same time a plan of approach to chase away the intruder.

Zebul is a man with military insight. If Abimelech comes soon, he may surprise Gaal. He will then have no time to form an ordered army from the men of Shechem. He also makes the recommendation to lay ambushes. Furthermore, he leaves it to Abimelech to act according to what the situation requires.

Verses 34-49 | Resistance Broken

34 So Abimelech and all the people who [were] with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. 35 Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who [were] with him arose from the ambush. 36 When Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains." But Zebul said to him, "You are seeing the shadow of the mountains as [if they were] men." 37 Gaal spoke again and said, "Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak." 38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your boasting now with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!" 39 So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech. 40 Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate. 41 Then Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem. 42 Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech. 43 So he took his people and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them. 44 Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who [were] in the

field and slew them. 45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who [were] in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt. 46 When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of [it], they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith. 47 It was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who [were] with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, and lifted it and laid [it] on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who [were] with him, "What you have seen me do, hurry [and] do likewise." 49 All the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put [them] on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those [inside], so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.

Abimelech obeys Zebul's council. He uses the tactics of his father Gideon. He acts at night and divides his army into groups (Jdg 7:16-19). When Gaal leaves the city gate, he sees Abimelech's army coming down from the tops of the mountains. But Zebul insists that it is an illusion. If Gaal doesn't let himself be fooled, Zebul challenges him to show that he's not only a chatterbox, but also someone who has the courage to fight.

The citizens of Shechem are the spectators in this battle. They haven't really taken sides with Gaal yet. Gaal is defeated and Zebul sees his chance to get rid of Gaal, so that he continues to hold authority over Shechem. This does not mean that he will bring Shechem back under the rule of Abimelech. The friendship between Abimelech and Shechem has been completely broken.

After Gaal is defeated, Abimelech wants to subjugate the apostate city again. He wants to take revenge for their lack of faithfulness to him. Hurt in his personal pride, he goes up against the city. The wounded pride of people with a high opinion of themselves has in all times and also in the Christian church been the cause of many struggles with many victims.

Abimelech does not waste any time. While the citizens of Shechem are working on the field, he occupies the city with one group, and two other groups rob the people in the landside. He who falls into his hands cannot escape his anger. He breaks down the city and sows it with salt to sym-

bolize a complete devastation and everlasting infertility (Deu 29:23; Psa 107:34). It is only two centuries later that Shechem is rebuilt (1Kgs 12:25).

The vengefulness and bloodthirst of the ruthless Abimelech are directed at the approximately one thousand remaining men and women of Shechem who have taken refuge in the tower of the temple of El-berith hoping that their idol will protect them. They are cruelly disillusioned.

Abimelech commands his men to do what he does (verse 48). His father also said something like this (Jdg 7:17). Only the example of Gideon is good and that of Abimelech is bad. Good example makes good followers, but bad example makes bad followers. Abimelech leads his army in a battle that is purely about his own interests and taking his revenge.

This is at the expense of his peers, his 'bones and flesh' as he called them in verse 2. But all that doesn't matter anymore. With the haze of resentment before his eyes he burns the crowd in the tower. The first part of Jotham's prophecy is fulfilled (verse 20a).

Verses 50-57 | The End of Abimelech

50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it. 51 But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower. 52 So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull. 54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died. 55 When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home. 56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers. 57 Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

The fulfillment of the second part of Jotham's prophecy (verse 20b) is not long in coming. In his insatiable hunger for power, Abimelech moves on to Thebez, a city that apparently was also under his rule, but has also become

apostate. Like Shechem, Thebez has a tower that serves as a refuge for the residents.

As the burning of the tower in Shechem has proven to be sufficient, Abimelech wants to use this tool to punish the inhabitants for their unfaithfulness to him. But then God's time has come to repay Abimelech for the evil he did. God uses a woman to execute His judgment. We've seen that before, in Judges 4, where Jael beats the enemy.

Until his death Abimelech thinks of his own honor. There is no thought of repentance for his life and the evil he has done. He does not want to go down in history as someone killed by a woman. It is to no avail. God writes history, not man. In 2 Samuel 11 Joab recalls this history to David and mentions the death of Abimelech by a woman (2Sam 11:21a).

After Abimelech's death, everyone goes back to his own place of residence. The strict regime of the power-hungry Abimelech no longer affects them.

The last verses prove that God is not mocked. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption" (Gal 6:7-8a). Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem have experienced the truth of this word. It is a warning that also speaks to all of us.

Judges 10

Introduction

The short reign of Abimelech has created a lot of history. Now we hear of two judges about whom little is mentioned, but who have governed for a long time. Together they govern for no less than forty-five years. They form a contrast with Abimelech and are a correction to his government or a remedy for it. It has been said: fortunately the people who have no history, because history is often nothing more than a story of sin, sadness and suffering. The long chapter on Abimelech is an illustration of this.

Abimelech had plunged the land into chaos and left it there. In this way, a local church can also be destroyed by the ‘mismanagement’ of overseers. There is a need for ‘Tola brothers’ and ‘Jair brothers’. We will see what they represent. We read nothing about great deeds of either of the judges. All they did was to keep peace among the people of God. After Abimelech’s abuse of power, this must have been a relief for the people.

Verses 1-2 | Tola

1 Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. 2 He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

We don’t know much about this judge, but we may be able to learn something from the meaning of his name. Tola means ‘a worm’. This already contrasts enormously with Abimelech. The worm speaks of humility and stands opposite to the man who exalted himself. Tola is “the son of Puah, the son of Dodo”. Puah means ‘expression’, ‘speaking’ and Dodo means ‘his beloved’, ‘belonging to love’. Here we can observe that everything he says has its origin in love.

The consciousness of Divine love is the source from which everything originates. As a result, whoever is aware of being the object of this love will speak about it (Puah) and have a humble mind (Tola). This is the answer to what people like Abimelech are and have done, and the result is the salvation of Israel.

Tola is a picture of Him Who revealed in perfection the mind of humility and redeemed His people. The Lord Jesus prophetically says: “I am a worm and not a man” (Psa 22:6a). This was His attitude toward all pride and seeking own honor of the religious leaders in Israel.

Tola lives in Shamir, which means among other things ‘diamond’. This name speaks on one side of shine and brilliance and on the other side of hardness, strength, inalterability. So it is also with a real mind of humility. It is full of brilliance and attraction for those who have an eye for it, and no insult or lack of understanding will change that mind.

Tola is buried where he lived. Perhaps we can apply it in such a way that his life has been a consistent life, without deviating from the principles expressed in it. His death did not change the ideas he had been standing for.

Verses 3-5 | Jair

3 After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years. 4 He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. 5 And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.

The successor of Tola is Jair. His name means ‘illuminator’. He seems to be someone who spreads light around him, Divine light. If we connect his name with that of Tola, then we can say that the mind of ‘worm’ leads to insight that can be passed on. The name Gilead speaks of this passing on, which means ‘witness’.

In Jair’s life, expansion becomes visible. He first has twenty-three cities (Num 32:41; 1Chr 2:22). That has become thirty in the verses we have before us now. We also see that through the lives of his thirty sons the light of their father is spread further. This is expressed in the meaning of the name “villages of Jair”. What has been translated as ‘the villages of Jair’ literally means ‘the lives of Jair’. Where Jair’s sons live, they reveal the light that radiates from Jair’s life. Thus the light expands.

The donkeys they ride on are a symbol of prosperity and a reign in peace. The Lord Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey (Zec 9:9; Mt 21:1-11; Jn 12:12-15).

Jair's sons are rulers, but without claiming leadership. They are leaders in practice. They each have their own small circle (village) for which they are responsible. In the same way, every believer has his own small circle where he has responsibilities. This concerns his place in the family, in the church and in the world, in society.

Just as the cities where the sons live are reproductions of the city of their father, so may the believers let shine the light of God in their lives. The believers are now "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14). They may be in their lives "reproductions" of Christ Who is "the Light of the world" (Jn 8:12).

There are thirty sons. The number thirty can be divided into ten times three. Ten is the number representing responsibility (think of the ten commandments); three is the number representing full revelation (think of the triune God revealed in Christ).

We can also see in all this a reference to the millennial realm of peace. Then Christ will reign and all believers may share in His reign and everyone will have authority over a number of cities according to the faithfulness shown during the absence of Christ (Lk 19:11-27). In that time Christ will rise as "the sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2) and shine as the true Jair, the 'Illuminator'. Then He will be seen in glory. This glory will be given to Him by God because He first humbled Himself so much and became a "worm" that was represented to us in Tola.

The 'worm' is found in the rejection of Christ and the 'sun' in His glorification. The rejection and the glorification are beautifully described in Philipians 2 (Phil 2:5-11).

Jair is buried in Kamon, which means 'resurrection', 'life from the dead'.

Verses 6-9 | A New Deviation

6 Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. 7 The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. 8 They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they [afflicted] all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan

in Gilead in the land of the Amorites. 9 The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed.

After Jair died, the Israelites again took the first steps on the treadmill of ‘doing what is evil – slavery – calling out to the LORD’, which had already caused so much doom for them. They have learned nothing from it. Are we, who together form professing Christianity, behaving better? Asking the question is answering it.

For the sixth time it is said that Israel does what “is evil in the sight of the LORD”. Never before have we seen so many idols united in Israel. Seven are mentioned to indicate the completeness with which the Israelites surrender to them. The land is full of it. There is room for all kinds of false gods, by which the true God is expelled. The living God is exchanged for dead idols. The idols are not added, but they come in God’s place, they replace Him.

God now leaves them to themselves, so that they may feel the yoke they have voluntarily taken on by serving the idols. When the feeling of God’s authority over life is lost and this authority is given to other things, idols, God is compelled to make the authority of those other things to be felt. To make the people realize what they are doing and to whom they have entrusted themselves, He surrenders them to the power of the Philistines and Ammonites.

The Ammonites

We have already paid some attention to the meaning of the Philistines. In the history of Samson we will hear more of them. In the history that follows, the Ammonites will come to the fore the most. They are on the other side of the Jordan and attack from there. They cross the Jordan to also wage war in the land.

Ammon is a half-brother of Moab. They were both conceived by their father Lot with his two daughters (Gen 19:36-38). Through the line of Lot they are family of the people of Israel (Gen 12:5). We already met Moab in Judges 3; Ammon is also mentioned there. Here the descendants of Ammon emerge as the enemies God uses to discipline His people.

As already mentioned in Judges 3, the name Ammon means ‘independent’. Ammon will prove himself in the next chapter as someone who deals in his own way with the things of God and His people. He gives his own, independent, at first sight logical, statement to assert his right to the land that Israel has taken possession of.

We can therefore see in the Ammonites a picture of the mind of the nominal Christians who reason the things of God and reach different conclusions than God says in His Word. In Ammon we see the danger of rationalism, the religion based on reason. If this enemy prevails over the people of God (verse 9), the result is that the people are deprived of praise (Judah), strength (Benjamin) and fertility (Ephraim).

Verses 10-16 | The Genuineness of the Confession Tested

10 Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, “We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.” 11 The LORD said to the sons of Israel, “[Did I] not [deliver you] from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? 12 Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands. 13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you. 14 Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.” 15 The sons of Israel said to the LORD, “We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day.” 16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.

The pressure on Israel becomes heavy. Then they call to the LORD with acknowledgment of the wrong. But look how the LORD reacts. He reminds them of the past deliverances He has brought about and how they have dealt with them. After every deliverance they have left Him again, and again they have started to serve the idols. Now they should go and ask those gods to deliver them.

This action of God does not miss its effect. The people understand that confession alone is not enough. The idols must be removed. We also see this with Jacob. In Genesis 35 we read that he commands his household to

put away the idols (Gen 35:1-5). Jacob is with his household on his way to Bethel. There he will meet God. He realizes that life with God and the love of idols cannot go hand in hand. Both Jacob then and the people now come to the awareness that the putting away the wrong is the true touchstone for real repentance.

Which idols are we dealing with? What are the things that make us wander away from God? It can be something different for everyone. But what happens when they are put away? They “served the LORD”. Then “He could bear the misery of Israel no longer” (verse 16). What a wonderful word! It indicates God’s special desire to help His people with all the compassion of His heart.

Verses 17-18 | The Call for a Deliverer

17 Then the sons of Ammon were summoned and they camped in Gilead. And the sons of Israel gathered together and camped in Mizpah. 18 The people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, “Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

It seems that the enemy is becoming active now that Israel has made a confession of the wrong and shown its genuineness by removing the idols. If the people of God seriously wants to serve God, the enemy will not stand by idly. He is getting ready to fight. The Israelites then do two things. First, they go to Mizpah and gather there. Mizpah means ‘watch tower’. They woke up and now pay close attention to what the enemy is planning. This brings them, secondly, to the question of who will be the leader of Gilead.

Unfortunately, this question shows that the previous deviations have reduced the feeling of solidarity among the people. They ask for someone who will only be head over Gilead. The consciousness of the unity of God’s people has apparently disappeared. Another thing that characterizes this downward spiral is that God is not asked who He wants to give as deliverer. This spiritual downfall is at its lowest point in Samson’s history, where the people no longer ask for a deliverer, but even come to deliver the God-given deliverer to the enemy.

To the request for a leader two important thoughts can be linked. One is that asking for a leader means that we want people who lead us in battle. It is also possible to think of something else in this question, namely the question of a principle, a view, based on a truth from Scripture, which we are convinced will lead us to victory. We will see in Jephthah a man who represents such a principle to us, namely a certain way of thinking and dealing with Scripture, with the enemy and with each other.

Judges 11

Introduction

Abimelech was the son of a concubine, Jephthah is the son of a harlot. The spiritual state in Israel has become so low that such a man becomes the instrument of God's deliverance. With this God puts the seal of His judgment on their spiritual state. Because of their condition He can't use people of higher descent. With Jephthah we see no appearance of the LORD, as with Gideon. It is the need that Jephthah brings to the stage, by order of the elders of Gilead, who have no other choice.

Jephthah shows us something of the reformation, when God wanted to give faith and strength to people who were not always spiritual, but who turned out to be suitable instruments for Him to deliver his people. The battle takes place on the wilderness side of the Jordan, not in the land itself. This kind of struggle also characterized the reformation. There was a lot of struggle to make the truth of Scripture known to the believers, while also contending to make these truths a reality in society: God's honor in all areas of life.

What was forgotten is that the church is a heavenly people. This people is not left by God on earth to participate in reign, but to be a testimony of the glorified Lord in heaven, Who will soon return to earth to establish His kingdom of righteousness and peace.

There are two sides to Jephthah's life. We see a man who bears a grudge because of his brothers' treatment, and we see a man who knows the Word, is clothed with the Spirit, and defeats the enemy. His negative character traits occasionally come to the fore, as with every one of us. How and what someone has been before his conversion, often brings effort to not give in to it. Despite all the things in which Jephthah gives the wrong example, we must keep in mind that God writes him down among the heroes of faith (Heb 11:32).

Verses 1-3 | Jephthah

1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah. 2 Gilead's wife bore him sons;

and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." 3 So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.

The name Jephthah means 'he who opens'. This points us to God, Who opens, reveals, spiritual truths and also opens the heart in which these spiritual truths get their place. Jephthah is the instrument God uses for this. Where God's Word has been closed by the Ammonites, who as we have seen represent the intellectual religion or rationalism, there must be someone who opens the Word again.

Jephthah comes from Gilead, that is from Manasseh. He is a child born of fornication, but he is the instrument chosen by God to fight against an enemy also born of fornication. First his quality is mentioned: he is a valiant warrior. So Gideon is also mentioned in the first words God speaks to him (Jdg 6:12). Then his origin is mentioned: he is the son of a harlot. Jephthah can't help being the son of a harlot. This is because of the sin of his father. This gave him an unhappy childhood, which at the same time formed him for the service for which God could later use him.

God often uses people who are not in esteem with others. Rejection is perhaps the most painful experience a person can live through in his life. But anyone who learns to deal with it in fellowship with God, becomes more and more like the Lord Jesus and thus becomes an instrument God can use.

The Lord Jesus was the Rejected when He was on earth and He is still for the world. Jephthah is rejected by his brothers, just as the Lord Jesus was rejected by His brothers. He is also despised for His humble birth. The people have said of Him: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary? (Mk 6:3). There is even an allusion that He was born of fornication (Jn 8:41).

The true reason that Jephthah is driven out is the greed of his brothers. If he would share in the inheritance, they would get a smaller share of it. Greed, also for fame and honor, is still a reason why someone is rejected today. Religious leaders have rejected the Lord Jesus and religious leaders still reject anyone who, by preaching the truth, endangers their position

of prominence. What applies to religious leaders applies to everyone. We want to get rid of someone who tells us the truth of God, by which we have to give up something, when we are not willing to do so.

Jephthah does not revolt. He could have used his strength to strike back. After all, he was a valiant warrior, wasn't he? But he flees and seeks refuge in Tob, which means 'goodness', where we could think of the goodness of the LORD. There he is further prepared for the service God will call him to. Such a preparation as a result of rejection can also be found with Moses and David. In Tob all kinds of men come to Jephthah who also don't have a home. The same we read in the history of David (1Sam 22:1-2). Through their connection with Jephthah, these men also become valiant warriors.

Verses 4-7 | Jephthah Is Asked to Be Chief

4 It came about after a while that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel. 5 When the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob; 6 and they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon." 7 Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me from my father's house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?"

The opening verses of this chapter form a kind of parenthesis. They tell us something about Jephthah. Verse 4 connects to the last of the previous chapter (Jdg 10:17-18). After the preparatory actions, the battle starts. The Ammonites go to war against Israel. The elders of Gilead face a big problem and that is that there is still no one who can lead them in the fight against the Ammonites. They see only one possibility left and that is to ask Jephthah.

Forced by circumstances, they are willing to accept the man they hated and rejected because of his despised origin, now as their leader because of his qualities. So it is also with faith in the Lord Jesus as the only Savior. Only when a person no longer sees any outcome in his distress does he resort to Him. Need leads someone to call upon Him.

Before answering their request, Jephthah reminds them of how unjustly he had been treated by them. It looks a bit like what Joseph does with his brothers. The brothers sold him to Egypt. God controls everything in such a way that Joseph becomes viceroy there. When the brothers, forced by

hunger, come to Joseph later, Joseph deals hard with them. He wants to make the brothers understand that they have done wrong, so that they will confess it and he can forgive them (Genesis 42-45).

Yet there is a difference between Jephthah and Joseph. Joseph accepted everything from the hand of God, but with Jephthah this does not seem to be the case. He accuses them of having treated him badly. All these years he has not forgotten what they have done to him and blames them for it.

We too can sometimes find it difficult to forgive and forget a bad treatment we have experienced. It comes up again, sometimes years later, under certain circumstances. An example. Someone is told that he is no longer needed for certain services. It can be anything, but let's suppose it is a sexton service in the church. Another one applies to take over. The sexton may feel put aside. When an appeal is made to him again later, it is difficult not to think back to what happened in the past.

Another example is that we are passed over for a certain service, even though we think we have quite some capacities for that service. However, another is preferred. If, for example, that other person moves and we are asked to replace the first choice, the thought may easily arise that we will not let them play with us and that they will also now have to look for someone else. Being second choice is often difficult to accept.

Verses 8-11 | Jephthah Is Made Head and Chief

8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "For this reason we have now returned to you, that you may go with us and fight with the sons of Ammon and become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." 9 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the LORD gives them up to me, will I become your head?" 10 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said." 11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.

The negotiations on Jephthah's position have not yet ended when he has expressed his grievances about the past. The elders of Gilead continue their efforts to persuade Jephthah to become their leader. In the introduc-

tion to this book it was noted that we can see in the judges a picture of the overseers or elders mentioned in the New Testament. Nowhere do we see that they need to be persuaded to become overseers. It is a voluntary matter. “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to [the will of] God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (1Pet 5:2-3).

Here are a few aspects that Jephthah should have taken more account of. But let us remember that this fact also applies to us. We can learn a lot from Jephthah, even how not to do it. It is therefore not a question of giving a brief indication of all things Jephthah is doing wrong. As is said, in what we want to learn from Jephthah, we must always remember that God has given him a place among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 (Heb 11:32).

With Jephthah we see that he only wants to help if they accept him as their leader. This is not the characteristic of a leader according to God’s thoughts. A true leader is ready as soon as there is a danger to the people, regardless of whether he is asked or not. And whether he is accepted or not, he will commit himself immediately.

With Jephthah it is not even so much about being the leader in the fight, but he also wants to be the leader after he has gained the victory. It seems that Jephthah speaks to the elders of Gilead from a personal hurt. Still, it is nice to see that he doesn’t count on his own strength for his victory over the Ammonites. He makes his dependence on God clear when he says: “And the LORD gives them up to me.”

The elders of Gilead agree with his proposal and reply with the swearing of an oath that they will keep their agreements. In turn, Jephthah declares that he will keep the agreement by making the LORD a Witness to all he has said. This seems to be the meaning of the words: “Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD”, which does not necessarily mean that God agrees with all Jephthah’s statements.

Verses 12-13 | The First Conversation With the Enemy

12 Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying,
“What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my

land?" 13 The king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now."

Jephthah begins his encounter with the king of Ammon by drawing a clear dividing line between Israel and his enemies. That may seem intolerant, but it is the only right way to deal with the enemy. Ammon means in a spiritual sense: error about what God has said. Any form of compromise is completely out of place here.

Therefore, modern theologians who use the human mind as a basis to judge the authority of the Bible can never be treated on a friendly basis. Such people must be made clear that they do not participate in the relationship that exists between God and His people. However kind such people may be, they are essentially enemies of the people of God. We can bear a lack of knowledge, not enmity.

The reaction is not long in coming. The king of Ammon confirms his claim to the land by pointing to its history. He makes another nice gesture: they can give the land back at will, then Israel does not have to fear that he will use violence. It sounds so plausible.

If Jephthah had not known the history of God's people, he would probably have succumbed to the arguments. This is how many people are doing today. They fall prey to the fine talk of modern theologians because they do not read the Bible themselves. They do not know the Word of God and are "tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Eph 4:14).

Verses 14-26 | The Second Conversation

14 But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon, 15 and they said to him, "Thus says Jephthah, 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab nor the land of the sons of Ammon. 16 For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh, 17 then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let us pass through your land," but the king of Edom would not listen. And they

also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. 18 Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon [was] the border of Moab. 19 And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land to our place." 20 But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz and fought with Israel. 21 The LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. 22 So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan. 23 Since now the LORD, the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it? 24 Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God has driven out before us, we will possess it. 25 Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them? 26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?

Jephthah knows the history of God's people very well. He is well aware of God's dealings with them in the past. He returns to the origin, as the apostle John says, what is "from the beginning" (1Jn 1:1; 2:13,14,24). John writes in view of certain errors that undermined the truth about Christ – that He is truly God and truly Man in one Person. Then you cannot do better than go back to what God has told in the beginning. What God has entrusted to us from the beginning, we must preserve and defend, but then we must know those words. The best way to resolve a conflict with 'Ammon' is to read a chapter from the Bible.

In everything that Jephthah brings forward of Israel's history, we see submission to what God has said. He recounts history as it has happened in reality and as God has made it written down. He knows his 'Bible' well and knows what is written in Numbers 21 and Deuteronomy 2, where it is described that Israel has conquered this area from the Amorites and not

from the Ammonites (Num 21:21-25; Deu 2:24,33; 3:1-10). The Amorites and the Ammonites are two different peoples, although the names still look so much alike. God has forbidden Israel to pass through the Ammonite region, and the Israelites have kept to this (Deu 2:37).

Jephthah's conclusion is clear. The LORD, the God of Israel, has given His people the land, and they have taken possession of it (verse 23). The same goes for us. We too can and must take possession of what God has given us in the heavenly places in terms of spiritual blessings, and do not allow them to be robbed. Jephthah challenges the king of Ammon to take possession of what their god gives them and thus makes the dispute a battle between God and the idols.

The last argument he uses is based on the number of years Israel has lived in the disputed area. Balak, the king of Moab, has tried to get rid of Israel by hiring Balaam and cursing the people of God through him (Num 22:1-7). That attempt failed and in the 300 years that followed, no attempt was ever made to free the cities conquered by Israel from the Amorites. Israel's right to those cities has remained undisputed all this time. And should they give up this area now? No way!

Verses 27-29 | Conclusion of the Argument

27 I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the LORD, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.” 28 But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him. 29 Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon.

Jephthah comes to this unequivocal conclusion: “I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me.” The conversation with the king of Ammon is over. Jephthah entrusts the case to the LORD, that He may act as Judge between the two nations. He is not waiting for an answer, continuing to talk makes no sense. He gives the LORD the last word: “May the LORD, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.”

Jephthah has provided convincing proof of Israel's right to the land on the basis of the Word of God. But the king of Ammon does not want to listen. Then "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah" and he goes to battle. There is no doubt that he is fighting for a just cause. Everyone who has heard his speech is encouraged by it. It is a battle that is fully in accordance with God's Word. This makes Jephthah's speech to the king of Ammon a true 'pep talk', a great encouragement for all those who go to war with him.

Verses 30-36 | The Vow of Jephthah

30 Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, 31 then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. 33 He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel. 34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one [and] only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take [it] back." 36 So she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon."

Before Jephthah actually engages in battle, he does something that is not necessary. He enters into a kind of agreement with God and thereby commits himself to do something the consequences of which he does not anticipate. With this he indicates that he neither knows God nor himself well. From Jacob we read something similar (Gen 28:20-22). Jephthah, who has shown an excellent knowledge of the history of God's people, does not learn any lessons from what Jacob has done.

By making a vow he, like Jacob, actually negotiates with God, indicating that he does not unconditionally trust God. By making a vow he, like Ja-

cob, considers himself capable of doing what he promised without taking into account the real content of his vow. He has been too quick in entering into this agreement with God. If he had thought for a moment, he could hardly have expected an ox or a sheep to come and meet him from his house. He is guilty of a vow made too quickly. There are several warnings for this in Scripture (Pro 20:25; Ecc 5:2).

There are also good vows made in the Bible, such as the vow of Hanna (1Sam 1:11). This is a vow that comes from a good spiritual mind and is made with a view to the honor to which God is entitled in the midst of His people. Hanna longs for that and wishes her child to be the instrument for it.

God gives Jephthah a victory of great magnitude and has convincingly fulfilled His part of the agreement. The message of the victory is quickly spread and when Jephthah arrives home, his daughter meets him. She is his one and only child. This is reminiscent of what God says to Abraham about his son Isaac: "Your son, your only son, whom you love" (Gen 22:2).

Jephthah's reaction is heartbreaking. He has not forgotten his vow. He suddenly realizes the disastrous consequences of his ill-considered speaking. It seems that he first of all blames his daughter for having to fulfill his vow in this way. He reproaches her for meeting him first from his house and reproaches her for plunging him into misfortune.

The vow he has made is irrevocable to him. He cannot come back to it, at least this is not possible for him. Leviticus 5 mentions a possibility to return to his rash words and confess them as sin (Lev 5:4-5). However, he must then bring a trespass offering (Lev 5:6). That he doesn't do this, shows something of Jephthah's character. On the one hand it shows that he is a man of character. He stands for his words. On the other hand, it shows that he is a man of inflexible principles. Then we see someone in Jephthah who is not prepared to lose face.

This characterizes many legal people. The consistent attitude of these people can command respect as long as they apply this attitude to themselves. However, as soon as they impose their principles on others, they cause a lot of damage to the other. They sometimes sacrifice wife and children to be able to live up to their statements. They cause a lot of mental damage to their relatives because they don't want to revoke the vows made too

quickly because of their fear of losing face. The next chapter will confirm this character trait of Jephthah.

It is remarkable, however, that the Bible itself does not make a statement about Jephthah's actions. What is said about this is an application. In addition, it is unclear whether Jephthah literally sacrificed his daughter, or whether it means that she has remained unmarried. This will be discussed in the next section.

In the daughter of Jephthah a beautiful mind comes to light. She submits herself completely to her father and makes no attempt to change his mind. She urges him to fulfill his vow, even at the expense of herself. In this she is a beautiful type of Christ Who also completely submitted to the way He had to go in obedience to His Father. In the history of Genesis 22 we see the same reference to the Lord Jesus in Isaac.

Verses 37-40 | How Did Jephthah Fulfill His Vow?

37 She said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions." 38 Then he said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. 39 At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, 40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

Many Bible teachers have wrestled with the question of whether Jephthah literally sacrificed his daughter. A small selection of what esteemed Bible interpreters have put forward on this subject shows that it is difficult to give an unambiguous answer to this question.

Henri Rossier: She would have to spend her whole life as a separated one and would not have a husband to have relations with, so she would always remain childless. In that sense she would live on as a dead person.

William Kelly: He sacrificed his daughter, after his determined intransigent mind. The holy wisdom of Scripture avoids the details of a fact that so contrasts with the thoughts of God.

Frederick William Grant: With regard to Jephthah's vow, with it seems to be connected haste and failure, but certainly not the human sacrifice that many have assumed. Most youngest commentators agree and believe that his daughter was simply dedicated to God to lead an unmarried life as verses 37-39 clearly show.

Martin Luther: Some maintain that she was not sacrificed, but the text is too clear to allow that explanation.

Kurtz, in *Sacred History*: Evidence of literal sacrifice is found in the father's desperation, the generous resignation of the daughter, the annual remembrance and mourning of Israel's daughters, and in the story of the writer himself, who is unable to clearly describe the terrible scene he sees with both admiration and horror.

Edersheim: The great Jewish commentators of the Middle Ages have pointed out, in contrast to Talmud, that the two expressions in verse 31 ("it shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering") are not identical. Never is it said of an animal burnt offering that it will be "the LORD's", for the simple reason that a burnt offering as such already is.

But if it concerns people who are offered to the LORD, then this expression is used, as in the case of the firstborn of Israel and of Levi (Num 3:12-13). But in these cases it has never been assumed that it is a literal human sacrifice. If the loving daughter had dedicated herself to death, it is almost incomprehensible that she wishes to spend the two months that remained of her life not with her heart-broken father, but in the mountains with her friends.

Samuel Ridout: I have never been able to change my mind about the fact that Jephthah has done with his daughter what every simple reader who reads this section believes he has done. He makes himself known as a severe, self-righteous man who later kills 42,000 of his fellow Israelites with a good conscience. Such a man is also able to literally sacrifice his own daughter. He had drawn the sword to defeat the Ammonites, he killed his daughter because he had promised it, and killed his brothers. Friend and enemy were treated the same.

Personally, I tend to think that Jephthah has indeed sacrificed his daughter. That is the impression I get when I read the text as it appears. It says

that he “did to her” according to the vow which he had made. In other words, to me this indicates that he took a concrete action.

After this selection still a remark is left to make about the last verse of this chapter. If the daughter Jephthah was commemorated annually, how much more is the Lord Jesus worth to be commemorated every day, especially every first day of the week.

Judges 12

Introduction

The end of the history of Jephthah is not very lofty and not worth imitating. Jephthah is not acting in gentleness here, but hard. Many people die as a result. He is not guided by love, but seeks his own honor.

Verse 1 | The Cause of the Conflict

1 Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you."

The Ephraimites have not changed since the events in the beginning of Judges 8. There Gideon met the Ephraimites in humbleness. Unfortunately, they did not realize how selfish they were. This shows that a good treatment does not have to lead to a better self-knowledge. Their proud attitude, stemming from their position, by which they think they have a right to a place of dignity, is still present.

They complain here again because they do not think they have been treated with due respect. A sin that is not sincerely confessed, reappears sooner or later. They appear to have sunk even deeper here. In Judges 8 they have at least done something (Jdg 8:2), here they have done nothing at all. In their wounded pride they threaten to burn Jephthah. They still cannot cope with the fact that others are used and they are not. This contrasts enormously with the mind of Paul (Phil 1:15-18).

Verses 2-3 | The Reaction of Jephthah

2 Jephthah said to them, "I and my people were at great strife with the sons of Ammon; when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. 3 When I saw that you would not deliver [me], I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?"

Jephthah does not react like Gideon, but reproaches them. The second part of the first verse of Proverbs 15 applies to him, as does the first part of that verse for Gideon: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Pro 15:1). It is striking how often Jephthah uses the word 'I' in what he says to the Ephraimites. The 'I and my people', that is Gilead, refers to partisan, sectarian actions. He no longer has an eye for all the people of God. Jephthah expresses himself in this way, because he feels personally offended.

When one's own 'I' comes to the fore, it becomes a search of one's own interest and standing up for one's own honor. These are the things that are found in people who are guided by law. If you want to be a zealot for the law, you cannot escape finding yourself important and seeking your own honor.

The law is given to man so that by keeping the law he may show that he lives according to the norm of God. But there is no one who has kept or can keep the law. This is not due to the law, but to man. Those who sincerely want to keep the law will discover that they cannot keep it. Such a person confirms the purpose of the law, which is given to show man who he is by nature. This is why it says: "But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious" and so on (1Tim 1:8-10). Through the law man learns to know his sinfulness. This will make him go to Christ with Whom salvation can be found through His work on the cross.

He who has taken refuge in Christ is free from the curse of the law. It is written: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"" (Gal 3:13). It even says that he who believes no longer has anything to do with the law: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4).

Whoever, as a Christian, still wants to keep the law, if only to do so out of gratitude, is once again under the curse of it. The law cannot produce anything else. The law can only condemn and kill because it is meant for the natural man.

When a believer (again) keeps the law, he does something that Paul denounces sharply in his letter to the Galatians. He describes the consequences of this in their dealings with one another in this way: “But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another” (Gal 5:15), and: “Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another” (Gal 5:26).

This is reflected in the life of Jephthah and it is also reflected in the lives of Christians who take the law as their rule of life. If one’s own honor is hurt and the rule of life is the law, then the reaction is one of retaliation, of standing up for one’s own honor. The result is that there is no more fruit for God. Ephraim means ‘fertile’ isn’t it?

The above does not mean that the Ephraimites can be excused. They behave far from worthy of their name. They are the instigators of Jephthah’s attitude. However, a lot of bloodshed would have been prevented if Jephthah had reacted otherwise. How much quarrel, discord and spiritual manslaughter would have been prevented in local churches if one’s own honor and interests had been set aside and brotherly love had been put into practice.

Verse 4 | The Cause of the Fratricidal Struggle

4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim [and] in the midst of Manasseh.”

The direct cause of the fratricidal battle is an insult that is not accepted by the other. The men of Gilead have been offended by the Ephraimites, they are deeply grieved. They have been scolded for runaway Ephraimites. What an insult! They cannot let this go unchallenged. This is how it comes to a battle between the two parties.

It is a good thing if we do not give an inch when the Lord Jesus or the Word of God is wronged or attacked. But if we are attacked ourselves, the situation is different. In the latter case, we can overcome evil with good and not evil with evil (Rom 12:21,17). Then there are no Divine principles at stake. We will see that in Judges 20 there is a situation that justifies a fratricidal battle for the fact that there are Divine principles at stake.

Jephthah spends a lot of time and patience with the enemy, but he has little patience with God's people.

Verses 5-6 | At the Fords

5 The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when [any of] the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," 6 then they would say to him, "Say now, 'Shibboleth.'" But he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim.

The tribes separated by the Jordan can only reach each other through the fords. And that is precisely where the slaughter takes place. The Jordan speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ and that we died and rose with Him. It is in fact a place where the unity of the people of God and their connection to Him must become most visible.

We can apply this to the place where the unity of the church should be most visible, namely at the Lord's Table. There is His death proclaimed: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1Cor 11:26). The cup speaks of the blood of Christ and the bread speaks of the body of Christ. The church owes all her blessings to this, including the blessing of being one church. In celebrating the Lord's Supper at the Lord's Table, she may show that unity: "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1Cor 10:17).

But what has been made of it in practice? Not much of this unity can be seen anymore because each group has its own thoughts and ideas about that 'being one'. These thoughts can be too broad, so that anyone who says he is a believer can partake of the Lord's Supper without any question and only on the basis of his own confession. This unbiblical unity can be found in the ecumenical movement, both in the established churches and in the broad stream of the evangelical movement. Because this aspect does not appear in this history, we will not speak about it here.

In the attitude that Jephthah adopts here, we can think of the other danger, the opposite of being too broad, namely being too narrow. This happens

when believers are barred from the Lord's Supper who can partake of it on the basis of Scripture. Scripture indicates that a believer can partake of the Lord's Supper if he

1. does not live in sin (1Cor 5:13);
2. has no wrong doctrine about the Lord Jesus and the Scriptures (Gal 5:1-10);
3. is not a member of any church or group of which he knows that these things are present there, but are not judged and removed (2Tim 2:16-21; 2Jn 1:9-11; 1Cor 10:18; Rev 18:1-5; 2Cor 6:14-17; Heb 13:9-13).

From all these Scriptures it is clear, what we also can understand well, that God and sin cannot go together. In short, it comes down to this: one must be personally pure in teaching and life and not have fellowship with believers who are not.

The Scriptures do not give any other conditions for partaking of the Lord's Supper and we therefore are not allowed to set them either. For example, if we demand that someone thinks precisely the same about the future of Israel as we do before he is accepted to partake of the Lord's Supper, we make 'the future of Israel' a 'shibboleth' (see verse 6). We then make insight into the prophecy a condition of partaking of the Lord's Table. It may well be that someone, in our opinion, does not have the right insight in this. He can be taught in it. But making such a thing a condition of partaking of the Lord's Table is an unbiblical restriction or narrowing of the fellowship.

It is important to look for the fords, that is to say, to look for what is present in common faith, to share this with each other. From there an upbuilding on the "most holy faith" (Jude 1:20) can take place. It is not about what separates, but about what unites, what binds.

Shibboleth or sibboleth (verse 6)

The word 'shibboleth' means 'corn ear' or 'flood'. Those who did not pronounce this word in the way the Gileadites thought it to be right, was killed. This word served to make a clear distinction between the men of Gilead and the Ephraimites. This word reminds us of making a division.

It is a danger that we can also recognize today, perhaps in our own hearts, perhaps around us. We think, or hear it said, that it is important to know

what distinguishes one's own religious community from other religious communities. What is wrong with others is widely measured, while one's own insights are considered correct.

I am not saying that we cannot be convinced for ourselves of the right place we occupy in the midst of a confused Christianity. We want to be part of and take responsibility in a local church that meets to biblical standards. It may be that we have found that place after earlier participation in other churches and/or religious communities. We will then indeed be able to indicate why we could not stay in a certain place. It will usually have to do with what God's Word says about the church of God, how things should happen there, what is allowed and what should not be allowed.

We cannot leave a church because one or more people there have been unfriendly toward us. Our personal experience is important, but a reason to leave can only be if there are things present or events that are demonstrably contrary to the Bible and there is no intention to change this in obedience to God's Word. It is important to know whether God's Word is given absolute authority and whether it is acted upon. When personal hurt or a difference in opinion about not fundamental things leads to a separation in God's people, a new 'shibboleth' has arisen.

Verse 7 | The End of Jephthah's Life

7 Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in [one of] the cities of Gilead.

God's Word mentions that Jephthah has led Israel for six years. This gives him the seal of God that he is someone appointed by Him, despite his failure against Ephraim. It is clear from 1 Samuel 12 that Jephthah was sent by God as much as Gideon, Barak and Samuel (1Sam 12:11), as is evident from his mention in the list of heroes of faith (Heb 11:32). He knew what God had done with His people. He knew, so to speak, the Bible. He took this as his starting point in fulfilling the commands God gave him.

Life was made difficult for him. In our view, he may have made wrong decisions. We have tried to learn some lessons from this. Yet, in the end, it is God who will set the standard completely justly over the life of Jephthah. Jephthah is one of those righteous who have not yet received what has

been promised (Heb 11:39). That moment will come. Then God will also reward Jephthah for the faithfulness he has shown on earth in the service to His people. To this end he is buried.

Verses 8-10 | Ibzan

8 Now Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him. 9 He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters [whom] he gave in marriage outside [the family], and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. 10 Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

After Jephthah there are again a number of judges of whom not much is said, just like after the reign of Abimelech (Jdg 10:1-5). Together, the three following judges account for twenty-five years of rest. If we may have a time of rest, it is a gift from God. He gives this to us as an opportunity to strengthen us spiritually and not to sleep.

The judges mentioned are in contrast to the failure of Jephthah. The first is called Ibzan, which means ‘purity’. Already something has been said about purity in our personal lives and in the fellowship of believers of which we are part. James speaks in his letter of wisdom as the origin of purity and the place it occupies in wisdom: “The wisdom from above is first pure” (Jam 3:17). Here we see that purity comes from a wisdom that has its source in heaven, in God, and that this wisdom on earth works first and foremost ‘purity’. This is because wisdom has an eye for the corruption that is in the world and through which it is surrounded.

Whoever lives in purity, that is to say in fellowship with God, will experience peace in his heart, and peace will radiate from him. Therefore James says that the wisdom from above is “then peaceable”. What follows, all connects to what is needed to live in a completely unclean world. The wisdom that is from above, may show in the midst of it what is found in God. But, as said, it starts with purity, the meaning of the name Ibzan.

Ibzan comes from Bethlehem, which means ‘bread house’. This is what every faith community should be. A local church will be a “bread house” for the hungry soul if especially the overseers take into account the purity and holiness necessary to count on the presence of God.

The contrast with Jephthah is evident from what Ibzan does. Instead of sacrificing his own daughter and killing his brothers, he has growth and multiplication. He has all his thirty daughters married. They take the purity they have seen with their father to their new surroundings. Thus he passes on the principle of purity which he himself upholds.

The same applies to his sons, who support his personal position. This can be inferred from the fact that they stay with him. Thus, every overseer who acts faithfully, that is, according to the principles of God's Word, can count on expansion and support of those principles by others.

All his sons and all his daughters marry. Ibzan must have had a family of which every young man and every young woman liked to be part of by marrying one of his children. It is good for parents to see their children fall in love with and marry believers from other local churches to go with him or her the way of the Lord and serve Him in their life. Ibzan did not stay at home, but goes out for his children. He also lets his children leave in peace when he has found a good place for them.

His good influence on Israel lasted seven years. The number seven indicates completeness, as we have seen before. The period that he judges must have been a blessing for the people. The place from which he comes, also becomes the place of his burial.

Verses 11-12 | Elon

11 Now Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; and he judged Israel ten years. 12 Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

Elon means 'strong'. He is a descendant of Zebulun, which means 'dwelling place'. Zebulun gets his name from his mother Lea, who says at birth: "Now my husband will dwell with me" (Gen 30:20). She thinks that she won Jacob's affection by the sixth son she gave birth to him. From this comes the thought of a reconciliation between Jacob and Leah.

What can we think of now when we read about Elon, the Zebulunite? That someone is called a strong man when he brings reconciliation where there is quarrel. It is someone who puts his hands on the shoulders of two quarrelling brothers or sisters. In Philippians 4 Paulus is such a strong man

(Phil 4:2-3). We can also show our strength by bringing brothers or sisters who are quarrelling together.

Elon is buried in Aijalon. One of the meanings of that name is 'place of oaks'. The oak is an example of strength and durability. With his death, his life is not over and forgotten. The same power he shows in his life is linked to his death. Elon shows something of the kind of leader about whom we read in Hebrews 13: "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7).

Verses 13-15 | Abdon

13 Now Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him. 14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys; and he judged Israel eight years. 15 Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

Again we can learn a lot from the meaning of the names. Abdon means 'service', Hillel 'song of praise' and Pirathon 'freedom', 'princely', 'summit' or 'retribution'. If the service of an overseer comes from a heart full of praise and can be exercised in freedom, this is a benefit for the church. Such an overseer or leader will do his job with joy.

Much depends on the believers among whom he does his service. It should not be made difficult for him. Here is the admonition: "Obey your leaders and submit [to them], for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb 13:17). For example, in each local church there is an interaction between the overseers or leaders and those who are being led.

If an overseer can do his work well, his (spiritual) sons and grandsons will continue the service and praise of their (spiritual) father and grandfather. Elderly and young people follow him. This also applies to the third generation, which is usually the generation that leaves.

The secret of his success is revealed by his victory over the Amalekites. He has conquered a piece of land from them during his lifetime. Amalek is a

picture of the flesh. Abdon shows us the picture of a person who in practice has done the following: “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24).

Abdon’s grave becomes a monument of this. Abdon has made his way up, in the mountains, by his victory over the flesh, of which the Amalekites are a picture. On his grave could be written: ‘He has conquered the flesh’.

Judges 13

Introduction

The history of Samson always appeals to the imagination. The man of great strength, who is also so weak. In contrast to the previous judges, who brought fellow citizens with them when fighting the enemy, Samson does everything on his own. He does not lead an army like Gideon and Jephthah. In this acting as a loner, where there is no connection with the people of God, Samson also seems to be focused on himself in a strong way. On the other hand, acting as a loner fits in with a people of God who, as a whole, have deviated far from the Word of God.

As far as professing Christianity is concerned, this situation can be found in Paul's second letter to Timothy. If the decay in Christianity has taken such forms that it is no longer possible for Christianity as a whole to be restored, it comes down to personal faithfulness to the Lord and His Word. This faithfulness is found in the separation from sin and dedication to the Lord. Then there can be talk of "the man of God" (2Tim 3:17). This is the man who in his own life shows the characteristics of God, while everything around him is in a state of decay. It is someone who stands for God and His rights in the midst of a professing Christianity that does not take them into account. The whole principle of strength lies in being separated to God.

It is good to keep in mind that the people of those days do not so much represent people of today, but they represent spiritual power that guides an entire people or the individual today. If we apply this to Samson, we see that he represents the idea of the Nazirite. In other words, God wants to show by him that, in a time of decay, spiritual strength can only be found in someone who walks in separation from evil and in fellowship with Him. Complete separation to God is the source of strength in the struggle against our spiritual enemies. In a perfect way this can be seen in Jesus Christ. He is the true Nazirite.

The history of Samson is one of peculiar contrasts. In him we see on the one hand the grace and purpose of God, the plan God has for him. On the

other hand, we see how little of it ends up in his life. What God means by Samson and who Samson is in practice are two different things. Samson is always a prisoner of the enemy from which he frees himself again and again. He even dies in the hands of his enemies, the Philistines. He is also a type of Israel that has separated God for Himself as a people, but that has not behaved as His people.

This is how it went with the church, which God has chosen as a heavenly people. The church has become unfaithful to its vocation to behave as a heavenly people on earth. She has become earthly oriented. Philistine principles have crept in and largely determine the face of the church, or rather professing Christianity. The following applies to her: "Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2Tim 3:5). That is what the Philistines represent. We will experience this phenomenon of 'holding to a form of godliness' again and again in the history we have before us.

For the church there is no complete restoration to be expected, although there are times of revival. Its earthly history ends, as in this book, in a still unbroken domination by the Philistines. Samson's life shows us something of the Christian testimony on earth, both communally and personally. If the testimony becomes an individual matter rather than a common one, it means that the whole is in decay.

In Judges 13, the first chapter of Samson's history, everything is seen from God's side. We see how He is at work and makes sure that everything is prepared for the birth and upbringing of the Nazirite. God wants Samson to be a Nazirite all his life.

Numbers 6 contains the law of the Nazirite. There we read that someone can consecrate himself as a Nazirite for a certain period of time on a voluntary basis. To Samson that choice is not presented. God has destined him to be a Nazirite all his life, and He arranges everything in a way that it is also possible for him to meet God's purpose with him. As this chapter makes clear, the entire preparation testifies to this.

That God does so is another testimony of His unceasing care and love for His people. This is even more evident when we think about how these people have once again become so unfaithful to Him, for the umpteenth time and now to the greatest extent. God is going to act sovereignly.

Verse 1 | The Philistines

1 Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.

For the seventh time we read: “The sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD.” The rod that God uses now are the Philistines. The Philistines are not mentioned among the seven evil nations of Canaan. They have already been involved in a disciplinary action before (Jdg 10:7). There, however, they are not the main enemy and they are now. They seize the land.

As for what or who the Philistines represent, something has already been said in the explanation of Judges 3:3. Because of the importance of the recognizability of this enemy, it is good to repeat a few things briefly and add some new characteristics. The Philistines represent people who externally occupy a position corresponding to what God has given to His people, without having a living relationship with God. They possess an external form of godliness (2Tim 3:5). In our time they can be compared to nominal Christians, people who pretend to be Christians, but are not born again. They are imitators.

Philistines represent a religion acceptable to not born again people. Their work is, for example, to stop up wells (Gen 26:16). The meaning of this is that they prevent the Holy Spirit from working, for wells are a picture of the Word of God which is made alive by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus speaks about this in John 4 and 7 (Jn 4:13-14; 7:37-39).

Philistines use the things of God for their own benefit. That is the reproach God makes, among other things, the Philistines, through the prophet Joel (Joel 3:4-5). An example is that the nominal Christian gives to certain important biblical definitions a completely different content. Just think of the blessing of the childhood and the sonship of the believer. Believers are called children of God and also sons of God. What makes the nominal Christian of them? He says that all men are children of God. In this way, this blessing is brought down to the level of the natural, not born again human being.

And what to think of their view on the physical resurrection of Christ, one of the foundations of the Christian faith? The nominal Christian also

speaks of the resurrection of Christ, but he means that Christ lives on in the ideas spread by His followers.

With the Philistines it is about recognizing the tactics they use to hollow out the truth of God and make it meaningless. To quote the verse quoted earlier from 2 Timothy 3: “They have denied its power” (2Tim 3:5). They invoke the Bible, but in reality the whole Bible doesn’t mean anything to them. Yet the only thing they want is to introduce their ideas to the Christian area. The Philistines are not enemies from outside the land, but they live in it.

Although they have no right to the land, for God has assigned it to His people (Deu 32:8-9), they still attach their name to it. The name Palestine is derived from the name Philistine. Of all Israel’s enemies, the Old Testament mentions most the Philistines. They have kept Israel in slavery longer than any other people. David has only defeated them once and for all.

If by grace and new birth we are children of God and not nominal Christians, we have to be very careful not to get under the spell of the pleasant life that the nominal Christians seem to lead. However, it is a life out of and for the flesh and not for God. The only thing that can save us from this is to occupy ourselves with the Lord Jesus, of whom David is a picture.

We see in Samson that he gets under the spell of the attractive side of the Philistines, represented in a few women. He is not the boss of his lusts. That means his downfall as a Nazirite and therefore he fails in his assignment. We will experience the same if we do not remain separated from what professing Christianity has to offer carnal man. We can no longer be a witness for God; our testimony will be destroyed.

Verse 2 | God Begins to Work

2 There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no [children].

Disciplinary action by means of the Philistines does not have the desired result. This time it does not bring Israel to a call to God. God waits in vain. The people have become accustomed to their misery and slavery; this is how deep they have sunk. If there is no calling, there cannot be a return. However, this does not mean that the sources of God’s grace are exhaust-

ed. He sees among the people who fear Him. To fulfill His plans, He makes use of a God-fearing couple, who also represents all the characteristics of weakness.

Manoah and his wife belong to the tribe of Dan. Dan is the weakest tribe of Israel, the tribe that has least responded to God's command (Jdg 1:34). They form a remnant like Joseph and Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth, the shepherds, Anna and Simeon are at the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus (Luke 1-2). These are also dark days in Israel's history. In addition, the woman is barren.

Also the meaning of the name Zorah does not make the case any brighter. Zorah means 'nest of hornets or wasps'. Wasps or hornets stick or bite meanly. They are a picture of satanic attacks, seductive spirits, with which we have to deal in the later times in which we live (1Tim 4:1-2). They 'sting' where they can, especially to discourage us from doing something for God.

The tribe of Dan is a treacherous tribe (Gen 49:17). Of all the tribes he is farthest from Jerusalem. Feeling at ease in such a place, having rest there – the meaning of the name Manoah is 'rest' –, is not a favorable sign. How can there be rest when everything is so contrary to God's will? In Zechariah 1 the rest is not healthy either. The reproach there is how the earth can be at rest, while the city of Jerusalem is in ruins (Zec 1:11). The following verses show that God will not leave this matter alone and that He is committed to Jerusalem. That is also the case here.

Looking at the background of Samson's birth, everything seems hopeless. But God starts His work where nothing more can be expected from man. This is how He usually works.

Verse 3 | Barren

3 Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no [children], but you shall conceive and give birth to a son."

The first one to hear of God's purpose is not Manoah, but his wife. God turns to her to indicate how weak the condition of the people is. The woman is in the Bible in general a picture of weakness. This weakness is fur-

ther underlined by the statement that she is barren. An extra emphasis is placed on this by adding that she has borne no children.

So God also addresses Himself to us if He wants to make vessels of blessing of us. It must penetrate us well: if God wants to make use of us, He does not do so on the basis of who we are by nature. By nature we are not able to bear fruit. He says this to Manoah's wife not as a reproach, but with love.

It seems that her barrenness has thrown her on the LORD. She will have often made known to Him her needs and desires. As a right-minded Israeli woman, she wishes offspring. Maybe she even prayed, like Hannah (1Sam 1:11), for a son who could be used by God. In the lives of Sarah, Rebekah and Hannah, also God-fearing, barren women, their barrenness has also caused exercises in the soul.

God's time has come for the wife of Manoah. He promises her a son and gives her some instructions, both for her and for her son.

Verse 4 | Instructions for the Wife

4 Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing.

Before discussing the conditions that the son must meet in order to be a Nazirite, the mother is told what she has to take care of. From this, we can learn that everything that can hinder the formation of a Nazirite must be removed. It is important that parents take these instructions to heart.

Parents must ensure that they do not allow influences that may spiritually disfigure their children. Parents who have the interests of God and His people close to their heart, will, in their desire for children, pray for children who will be of use to the church. They want them to become true servants of God. They will not be satisfied with less. It's about God's church.

The family is not the only area where the formative influence is determined. The local church is also an atmosphere where children are formed. All those who are part of a local church should take into account the fact that their behavior affects the spiritual development of the children attend-

ing the meetings. This also applies if the children go with the parents into the houses of the fellow believers.

The upbringing of our children is aimed at making them live separated for the Lord. This requires from the parents to set an example. This attitude should be present with the parents even before the children are born. Wine or strong drink represent the pleasant things of life which in themselves do not have to be wrong. We have seen before that wine rejoices the heart of God and men. Wine is a picture of earthly, lawful joy. But if the desire is present to live entirely for God as a Nazirite, the danger that lies in earthly joy must be recognized.

The things of the earth can have an intoxicating effect. Earthly things can cloud the view on the true calling to live completely for God. They can be given such a large place that they take up the heart and time of someone who is called to live for God. The interests are gradually shifting from a focus on God and the things of heaven, to a focus on oneself and the things of the earth. It is more and more about our well-being than about what God is concerned with in view of His people.

It is also much more pleasant to enjoy to the fullest the good things of this life than to distance oneself from them and instead suffer hardship, slander and loneliness because of the unfaithfulness of God's people. We must indeed have a good eye for what we live for, or better, for Whom we live.

Besides these things that are not wrong in themselves, Samson's mother should not eat anything unclean. What is unclean is connected to sin. She must not allow anything sinful in her life. Thus she can remain in connection with God, Who cannot be connected to anything unclean. Parents can't desire anything from their children in which they themselves are lacking. If parents read bad literature themselves, they cannot expect their children to stay away from it. Spiritual life will then not blossom, but die. If impurity is not given a chance, the power of spiritual life will be able to develop.

It will be clear that giving up harmful business does not in itself guarantee healthy growth. For this to happen, good food must be eaten. Yet in this history, the Holy Spirit especially emphasizes how necessary it is to renounce any hindrance that stands in the way of a proper fulfillment of

being a Nazirite. How important are these instructions for parents who want to raise their children to useful instruments in the hand of the Lord.

A Nazirite is someone who shuns what stimulates nature (no wine or strong drink), who takes the woman's place in weakness (let his hair grow) and who only wants the power of life to work (do not come into contact with death). These are the necessary conditions for the formation of that Nazirite with whom God can carry out His plan. This plan is to set aside the religion of the flesh – of which the Philistines are a picture – in order to prepare the way to introduce the man after His own heart, the Lord Jesus.

Verse 5 | The Nazirite

5 For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

The word Nazirite means 'separated' or 'consecrated'. Both meanings are important to get to know God's purpose with the Nazirite and hopefully to put it into practice. His purpose is to live a life that is separate from sin and dedicated to God. God wants these things to affect our heart and our conscience and to be worked out in our life.

More Nazirites are mentioned in the Bible. It says of Joseph that he is "the one distinguished [that is a Nazirite] among his brother" (Gen 49:26). Samuel and John the baptist are also Nazirites (1Sam 1:11; Lk 1:15). The Lord Jesus is the Nazirite par excellence. He has drunk wine and touched unclean people and even dead people. Nowhere is there any indication He had long hair. Yet He is the true Nazirite, because He has fully complied with the spiritual meaning of the precepts that apply to the Nazirite. We too are faced with the spiritual significance of these precepts and are called upon to follow the Lord in them.

As said, Samson's being a Nazirite is not a voluntary matter, but a calling from God. It will be his exercise to respond to that calling. It is remarkable that the regulations that the Nazirite must comply with in Numbers 6 are divided here between Samson's mother and Samson himself. The mother is not allowed to drink wine or strong drink, although this of course also applies to Samson, whereas of Samson is only told here that he is not al-

lowed to cut his hair. The long hair is an external feature, visible to others, while the other feature marks are not visible to others. The characteristics that are not visible are more related to the mind of the heart. His long hair, which is visible, is more in connection with showing that mind.

In the discussion of Judges 5:1 something has already been said about the general meaning long hair has in Scripture. With regard to Samson, the following can be added. The woman has long hair, this is normal. It is her honor (1Cor 11:15). It is a constant symbol of her dependence and it is also her glory. If a man has long hair, "it is a dishonor to him" (1Cor 11:14). God imposes this shame on the Nazirite. The Nazirite thus shows that he is giving up his place as a man, as the head of creation, and that he is taking a place of dependence, that of a woman. By this he indicates that he wants to be weak, so that the power of Christ may dwell upon him (2Cor 12:9b).

A negative example of what long hair represents can be found in Revelation 9. There the monsters are seemingly strong, but in reality they derive their strength from someone else, namely the demonic Apollyon, which is depicted by their "hair like the hair of women" (Rev 9:7-8). They do not follow their own will, but are dependent on this angel from the abyss that has power over them and governs them. For the Nazirite, his long hair means that his whole strength lies in his dependence on God.

About Samson is still written in our verse: "He shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." It expresses that he will not bring about a final deliverance.

Verses 6-7 | The Woman's Report

6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he [came] from, nor did he tell me his name. 7 But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

When Manoah's wife has heard the prophecy, she goes to her husband. She first tells him about the appearance of the Angel of the LORD before she tells what He has told her. The Person Who brought the message has

made a greater impression on her than what she has heard from Him. She calls Him “a man of God” with “the appearance of the angel of God”. In the Old Testament prophets are sometimes called ‘man of God’. By calling Him so, she acknowledges the Divine source of the message.

He also looked like an “angel of God”. It seems that she feels that this Person is more than a human being. She cannot say exactly Who He is. But His appearance makes her afraid. When Gideon discovers that he is dealing with the LORD Himself, he is also afraid (Jdg 6:22). Isaiah expresses the same feelings (Isa 6:5), as does Moses (Exo 3:6).

Because of this terrifying sight, Manoah’s wife did not dare to ask for His Name. The Visitor has also not made know to her His Name. He did tell her some things. He promised her that she shall conceive and give birth to a son. He also told her what she should not drink and eat. Finally, He told her that God wants this child to be a Nazirite to God. But she says nothing about their child’s mission, that he would fight against the Philistines.

Verse 8 | Manoah’s Prayer

8 Then Manoah entreated the LORD and said, “O Lord, please let the man of God whom You have sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born.”

It is wonderful to see how Manoah reacts to everything his wife tells him. He trusts her completely. He knows his wife’s relationship with God and knows that she does not imagine anything. It is not strange for this couple to share things they have heard or seen from the LORD. Manoah and his wife can talk about the things of the LORD together. It is their common desire to live according to God’s will.

Also today, the way in which man and wife can share the things of the Lord with each other is the basis of a good marriage. Both should have their own relationship with the Lord through personal Bible reading and personal prayer. One cannot do that for the other. But they should not live both their own life apart from each other. Sharing with the other what each has seen of and received from the Lord, and correcting each other in certain matters, results in a harmonious marriage.

Manoah believes that what his wife has told her is a message from God. That is the starting point for his prayer. He has no doubt that what God has said will happen. He only has a question. That question is about the upbringing of the child that will be born. Parents-to-be will get to see a nice example here.

Verses 9-14 | Answers to Prayer

9 God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her. 10 So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, "Behold, the man who came the [other] day has appeared to me." 11 Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to the woman?" And he said, "I am." 12 Manoah said, "Now when your words come [to pass], what shall be the boy's mode of life and his vocation?" 13 So the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Let the woman pay attention to all that I said. 14 She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded."

"God listened to the voice of Manoah." What an encouragement for anyone who desires to raise children according to God's plan. The way in which prayer is heard is consistent with the earlier visit of the Angel of God. Again God passes by the man to make it clear that nothing of the man's power can have a place in deliverance. He goes again to the woman when she is alone. She immediately recognizes Him and quickly goes to get her husband. There is no doubt with her, while Manoah has his questions.

He must first be sure that he is indeed dealing with the Person of the first visit. He receives the confirmation. Then he repeats the question he asked in his prayer in verse 8. However, there is a difference between verse 8 and verse 12. In verse 8, he asks how they, as parents, should treat the child. In verse 12 the question refers more to the child itself. He asks about the mode of life and the vocation of the boy.

Asking such questions is important. Parents who do this are aware that they will not have children for themselves, but that they may raise them up for God so that He may be glorified in the lives of those children. In fact,

it is about the question for which we raise our children: for a high position in this world or a high position in the kingdom of God? A high position in the kingdom of God requires taking a humble place.

In order to enter the kingdom of God, a child must first be "born again" (Jn 3:3,5). Then the development of the Christian character must take place. This is done by growing in the things of God. A child thus formed will later prove to be of great use to the church and in the service of God.

It is important to pay close attention to the child's mode of life. Parents must ensure that children make time for the Lord's things, even when they are busy with homework and the like. It is important that their children learn to have a personal relationship with the Lord and to involve Him in everything they do. Children may get to know in the Lord Someone with Whom they may have a confidential relationship.

It is also good to pay attention to the nature of the work they may do for the Lord. Each child has different abilities, is differently equipped by the Lord. Good parents will encourage their children to use their natural abilities for the Lord. They may also teach their children that God likes it when they do what they can. They don't have to be more than they are.

This awareness of being accepted by God depends to a large extent on the feeling parents give their child that it is accepted by them as it is. Accepting things that are wrong is, of course, excluded.

The answer Manoah gets is the same as the answer his wife has heard before. This answer does not refer to the boy but to the mother. It is remarkable that the Angel does not tell the father these things. We can learn from this that the atmosphere in the house is most determined by the mother and that especially her influence on the formation of the child is great.

When the Angel repeats His answer He gave to the woman earlier, He gives a small extension of the things she must refrain from: "She should not eat anything that comes from the vine." This indicates that raising a child requires a lot from the parents.

Abandoning one's own interests and giving up all kinds of pleasures is fundamental for achieving the set goal. This certainly does not mean that there is no more fun to be had or that parents should always be afraid to do

something wrong. It's about what parents are willing to do to really enjoy their children. Such parents will wholeheartedly agree with the word of the apostle John: "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (3Jn 1:4).

In the world, and unfortunately it also occurs among Christians, people do not want (for a while) to have children because they are seen as an impediment to experiencing "the fun things of life". Children cause too many obligations. Whoever sees the real purpose of the child blessing will want to work hard to know that real joy.

Verses 15-21 | The Offering of Manoah

15 Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a young goat for you." 16 The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, [then] offer it to the LORD." For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD. 17 Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that when your words come [to pass], we may honor you?" 18 But the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" 19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. 20 For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw [this], they fell on their faces to the ground. 21 Now the angel of the LORD did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD.

From everything Manoah has heard and experienced, it has become clear to him that a special Guest is visiting him. He must have had the impression that he is dealing with a Divine Person. This is evident from the fact that he wants to offer his Guest an offering, something that can only be done to God. The offering he wants to bring is the same as the offering Gideon brought to his heavenly Guest (Jdg 6:19). Yet Manoah doesn't know Who he really has before him. Only in verse 21 does he come to the acknowledgment he stood face to face with the Angel of the LORD.

That Manoah knows not yet Whom he has before him, also becomes clear from what the Angel of the LORD says to him in verse 16, that he must

bring his offering to the LORD, and not to Someone Who is unknown unto him. This shows us that God wants to be honored by people who know Him and have a relationship with Him through faith. He cannot accept an offering that comes from vague feelings about Him. It is like with the rich young man, who calls the Lord Jesus “good Teacher”, even without realizing to Whom he speaks (Mk 10:17-18).

Only if Manoah acknowledges Him as the LORD, as God, He will accept the offering, or courtesy, but then the bringing of it must be done according to the directions He gives. This brings Manoah to the question his wife did not ask. He asks for His Name. He would like to know more about Him. The name, which we have seen before, often indicates what kind of person we are dealing with. The Name of God expresses His Being.

The name by which He reveals Himself to Manoah is “Wonderful”. This name is also found in Isaiah 9. There it is clearly about the Lord Jesus. It says of Him: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; ... And His name will be called Wonderful (Isa 9:5). The name “Wonderful” indicates the Being of the Lord Jesus. He is truly God and truly Man and yet one Person. That wonder is too great for the comprehension of the human mind. Hence the name “Wonderful”.

When Manoah then brings his offering, something wonderful happens. His Visitor goes to heaven in the flame that ascends from the altar. This is a picture of what happened to the Lord Jesus on the cross. When He suffered there and died under the fire of God’s judgment on sin, at the same time a pleasant scent ascended from the cross to God. God was glorified by the work of His Son. On this basis God has given Him the place of glory in heaven at His right hand.

We may now know there is a glorified Man in heaven. The church is inextricably connected with the glorified Man in heaven. God shows this “wonderful action” precisely in a time when decay is on the increase to encourage those who wish to serve Him faithfully as a Nazirite. This will direct the eye upward. To look upward “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col 3:1) is the necessary attitude to stand firm as a Nazirite.

After it has been indicated what does not belong in the house where the Nazirite is born and raised (wine and impurity), the positive is now com-

ing forward. The house is as it were filled with the scent of the offering, in which the glory of Christ is represented. The Gospel according to Mark, in which the Lord Jesus is presented as the true Servant of God, ends with a look into heaven: "The Lord Jesus ... was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God" (Mk 16:19). This look into heaven is an encouragement to anyone who wants to serve as a Nazirite to the Lord.

Verses 22-23 | Reaction of Manoah and His Wife

22 So Manoah said to his wife, "We will surely die, for we have seen God." 23 But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear [things] like this at this time."

When it has reached Manoah with Whom he has been dealing, he becomes afraid and fears that he and his wife will die. However, there is no reason for this, because the offering was accepted. His wife understands this well. Manoah reasons from himself toward God. His wife reasons from the offering. Her attitude shows the certainty of faith we find for the Christian: "If God [is] for us, who [is] against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:31-32).

Again we see how the relations of this couple are. Manoah is spiritually weaker than his wife. As a real help next to him, she points out to him the value of the offering and the actions of God. It is nice when husband and wife can interact in this way and point out such things to each other.

Verses 24-25 | Samson's Birth and First Performance

24 Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the LORD blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

God's promise is fulfilled. The promised son is born and his mother gives him the name Samson. His name is formed from the word for 'sun'. Maybe this is an indication that God wants to let new light shine for Israel in this dark time, the light of hope for deliverance. What Samson did in his

youth is not mentioned. What is mentioned, however, is the place where he started his service, in Mahaneh-dan, which is in his immediate vicinity. The service of anyone who wants to do something for the Lord always begins in the immediate surroundings: at home, in the neighborhood, at work, at school. It starts at home. Then the circle of service grows. Sunday schoolwork and being unruly at home do not match. It is impossible to 'enter into mission work' without first testifying at home, in the surroundings. Nor can a brother serve other local churches if he never makes himself heard in his own local church. The influence of the Spirit and its effects are first perceived in the domestic sphere.

Samson grows up in the most ideal circumstances, very different from, for example, Jephthah. He has parents who fear God, the LORD blesses him, has taken him apart for Himself, and the Spirit of the LORD guides him already in his younger years. Despite all these great privileges, Samson's life has a tragic course as we will see in the following chapters.

Judges 14

Introduction

In this chapter the history of Samson begins. This history is divided into two parts. Both parts are concluded with the remark that he has judged Israel twenty years (Jdg 15:20; 16:31). In his history, we learn that God's aim, which is put forward in Judges 13, and practice, are two different things. We also see, in a living illustration, how close strength and weakness are to each other. It is not about having a life without difficulties, but about having the strength to overcome them.

No one is without struggle. Someone can be strengthened by struggle, but also suffer defeat. This struggle can be caused by conflicts with parents, brothers or sisters, fellow believers. Struggle can also be the result of inner conflicts as a result of failure. The question is how we respond to it. We will never find complete ideal living and working conditions. We can think that if things were different around us, we could prove what we are worth. With Samson we see how he becomes powerless again and again because he is not able to say 'no' to the temptations around him. Sometimes he also seeks out these temptations himself. That is where even his history begins with.

Verses 1-2 | First Contact of Samson With the Enemy

1 Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, [one] of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, [one] of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

The first step someone takes on the way in the service of God is characteristic of the continuation. If it is a wrong step, the bad consequences will not be failing, especially if someone continues on that wrong path. The first step is the way to all the other steps. That is why it must be set in the right direction. Jonah is a telling example of this. God instructs him to go to Nineveh to preach there, but he is going in exactly the opposite direction. The result is that he gets into great difficulties and brings those difficulties

over others as well (Jn 1:1-15). You never go the way away from God alone. You always take others with you. We see this here too, with Samson. He draws his parents along on his willful, wrong way.

Samson's first step may be outwardly in the right direction. It would have been a good step if he had gone to Timna to drive out the Philistines from there. However, his actions make clear that he did not go to Timna to fulfill a command from God, but that he is driven by his own desires. There he actually falls in love with someone who belongs to the enemies of God. He is getting it done to connect himself with the enemies of God's people.

From this we can learn how attractive something or someone can be of which or of whom God's Word clearly says that we should not connect with it. We are no better than Samson. The Philistines, as has already been said, represent a system of so-called Christian thinking that can be understood by the natural, not born again human being. These are ideas that generate many followers in professing Christianity. They caress the flesh, it is pleasant to listen to or watch.

A simple example can be seen in the beautiful buildings that have been built which are called the 'house of God', in which beautiful music, with which the service is enlivened, must tickle the ear. All this can make a big impression and seem attractive, it can increase the prestige of the religion. What the Philistines represent is to apply to everything people have thought up to beautify the serving of God.

Such, purely human, inventions have the effect of making the Christian faith so attractive that even not born again people want such a belief. At least they can feel comfortable with this. Those who fall in love with such things, fall into the trap in which Samson has fallen. This is a spiritual lesson we can learn from this.

There is also a practical lesson to be learned. If a young man wants to serve the Lord, it is important that he does not make any connections that will hinder him in this service. Therefore every step has to be done in prayer for guidance. This applies especially to the choice of the wife with whom he wants to serve the Lord. She must belong to God's people and have the same faith and obedience. She must also have the same mind.

Samson's connection to the enemy makes it impossible for him to testify against it. Women play a fatal role in his life. He has had three. They represent the devil's snares. The devil knows exactly where the most powerful believer is weak, because everyone has a weak spot. Therefore, a powerful believer must also be constantly aware of this weakness. Only then he really is strong (2Cor 12:10).

Timna means 'allocated part'. Samson leaves his own inheritance to seek one with the Philistines.

Verse 3 | The Parents of Samson

3 Then his father and his mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me."

Samson drags his father and mother along on his way of disobedience. They are emphatically involved in this history. They themselves are responsible for their compliance, for they have received personal instructions from the LORD. They should have said 'no'. They protest, but still go along.

Unfortunately, this is sometimes the attitude of parents whose children go a willful way. The devil knows that if he can lead the children on the wrong way, there is a good chance the parents will follow. When Moses had to deal with one of the same stratagems, he saw through the stratagems. He did not accept Pharaoh's proposal that the parents should go, as long as the children would stay in Egypt (Exo 10:8-11). He knew that if the children didn't leave Egypt, the parents would want to return to Egypt once they were in the wilderness.

It is not the case that Samson's parents follow him without blow or bump. They raise their objections. In veiled terms they refer to the precept of God in Deuteronomy 7 (Deu 7:3). It says that an Israelite may not marry any of the peoples still dwelling in the land.

Despite the objections of his parents, Samson sticks to his intention. In his answer, following his own desires emerges. His statement, "she looks good to me", is not a language for a Nazirite who has renounced his own

pleasure. Self-denial should be characteristic of one who is separated by and for the Lord. He does not ask whether she looks good to the LORD.

Verse 4 | It Is of the LORD

4 However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

This verse seems to contain a contradiction. How can God work something wrong? But we have to read well. It does not say that God works wrong. He does not cause sin. What He does do, however, is to use Samson's wrong deed for His purpose. Thus God stands above all our follies; He can use them for His purpose.

That God can use our follies for His purpose, may and can never be an excuse for committing them, for He is not the processor of our follies. We read an example of this in Peter's address in Jerusalem on Pentecost. He says to the people: "This [Man], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put [Him] to death" (Acts 2:23).

Here we see on the one hand the counsel and foreknowledge of God and on the other hand the evil actions of man. The wonderful thing is that man's evil actions, what he did with the Lord Jesus, fit into God's plans. God has used the crime that man has committed against the Lord Jesus to carry out His plans.

It does not acquit man. He is guilty of the death of the Lord Jesus. God's use of this magnifies Him. He uses man's guilty actions to glorify Himself thereby. All this shows how far God is beyond what we, men, do.

Something like this we find in what God says about the division of Israel into two and ten tribes, which is the result of the unfaithfulness of Solomon and Rehoboam. Of that He says: "For this thing is from Me" (2Chr 11:4). Does that mean that God has worked this division? Not at all! God is not the processor of evil. It only means that God uses man's unfaithfulness to fulfill His counsel. Once again: this is not acquitting man, he receives the fruit of his deeds. It shows that God is above the deeds of man, He is not embarrassed by them, but knows how to use them to achieve His purpose.

Another example is from the practice of life. It is very much in line with what is being said here about Samson and could clarify a few things. If a believing man enters into a relationship with an unbelieving woman or a believing woman with an unbelieving man, it is a relationship that the Bible clearly forbids: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers” (2Cor 6:14). The fact that God is able to use this relationship to save the unbeliever is totally independent of the believer’s actions. The salvation of the unbeliever is exclusively pure grace from God. It is in no way a merit of the believer. He must confess his sin, otherwise there will be no lasting happiness for the earth from that relationship.

Verses 5-7 | Samson Kills a Lion

5 Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion [came] roaring toward him. 6 The Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done. 7 So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson.

Samson’s parents follow him on his wrong way. Think about this, that he, the Nazirite, of whom God has said that “he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines” (Jdg 13:5), will marry a Philistine woman! On his way to Timnah, close to the vineyards, a young lion comes roaring toward him. It seems that he took a different road than his parents, because later they don’t know what happened, see also verse 9. From this we can learn some lessons.

Take a look at the vineyards. This is an extremely dangerous environment for a Nazirite, who is not allowed to eat anything from the vine (Num 6:3). Samson looks for the danger. He walks on the border. Anyone who wants to be a true Nazirite will stay as far away from dangerous places as possible.

Samson does what also can happen in the lives of young Christians. They go out of curiosity to places of which they know they should not go. The pub, the cinema, the funfair, the red light district of the big city, these are all areas where a Christian should not be without a command of God.

If we choose to take such a 'side road' ourselves, there is a good chance that a 'lion' will come to us. The lion is here a picture of the devil. "Be of sober [spirit], be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1Pet 5:8). If we leave the path of obedience, the devil comes toward us. In 1 Kings 13 there is also mention of someone who meets a lion on his way (1Kgs 13:23-24). The lion is used by God to kill the man of God from Judah, who has deviated from the way God has appointed for him.

This is not the case with Samson, as fortunately it is not always the case with young believers, when they look for wrong places out of curiosity. When the brutal violence or the sucking power of seduction suddenly penetrates them, they run away quickly. Running away from a wrong place where someone has ended up through one's own fault is a defeat that must be confessed. Such a one leaves no witness for the Lord in that place.

Samson uses his strength to free himself and not to defeat the enemy. Characteristic of Samson is his great strength. God has given him this enormous physical strength to overcome the Philistines. For us this means that we need strength to overcome what the Philistines represent. God has also given us this power: "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2Tim 1:7). By being dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to overcome the things that people have come up with to make the Christian faith attractive. That is to say, we will recognize and reject such things.

But the power of the Spirit is not experienced if we let our flesh work. We then easily fall under the spell of what in faith makes the experience of man central and not what God says about it. In their eyes, the experience of faith must be a cheerful one. The fact that the Spirit came upon Samson mightily proves that God is above Samson's self-will. Without the power of the Spirit Samson would have been lost, for he was not in the way of obedience. Sometimes, where the flesh reveals itself, God can still, through His Spirit, do something above it for the protection of His own, even though they behave carnally.

Samson has overcome the roaring lion in the power of the Spirit. However, he does not realize this, because he follows his own path. That is why he

falls for the seduction of a woman. The daughters of the Philistines represent principles that make religion pleasant, attractive to the flesh. All kinds of regulations are created to make serving God 'tastier', such as music, impressive speakers, flags, dances, external frills. People must be lured by what appeals to them. All these things are not a help for the Nazirite, but an obstacle.

Verses 8-9 | Honey From the Dead Lion

8 When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion. 9 So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave [some] to them and they ate [it]; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.

When Samson sets off to marry the Philistine woman, he visits the place where he killed the lion. There he sees a swarm of bees that has made honey in the lion's body. Death gives rise to an abundant and ordered activity, which is represented in that swarm of bees. The product of bees, the result of their activity, is honey. Together with the milk, honey is the blessing of the land. Israel is a land flowing with milk and honey (Exo 3:8).

Here we see in picture that life arises from death. This picture speaks, despite that it is connected with a deviated Samson, of the death of Christ "who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light" (2Tim 1:10). The believer derives everything from the death of Christ.

Honey is the product of diligently cooperating bees in the body of a dead lion. Honey represents the sweet, the lovable in creation, something God has given in the natural relationships between people. One of the characteristics of the "last days" (2Tim 3:1) is that people are "unloving", which is 'without natural love' (2Tim 3:3).

To enjoy the sweetness of mutual love in marriage and family, that love must be based on the death of Christ. If this is the starting point of our life, we will work together in preparing honey. This requires an active cooperation, nourished by love. There is no 'Philistine' who knows this. In the days described in 2 Timothy 3, having an active spiritual life is necessary, and the power of God comes to our aid.

Samson takes the honey in his hands and eats it. The hand that killed the lion is also the hand that holds the blessing. Every victory a believer gains over the devil in his life, for example by resisting a certain temptation, gives him food. After all, it is through God's power that he gained this victory, didn't he? That awareness makes grateful and prevents self-esteem.

However, it is a pity that Samson doesn't tell his parents anything about his experiences. It is a good thing to share as a young person with your parents the experiences you have with the Lord. If parents do not know the Lord, it is difficult, but it is not impossible. The Lord wants to give wisdom for that. There are also parents who know the Lord, but show little interest. In that case, your experience may be an incentive for them to become more involved with the Lord and His Word. Then you can experience the opposite of what we saw earlier with Samson, that he dragged his parents along on the wrong road.

It's an assumption, but it may be that Samson didn't want to tell his parents because deep in his heart he knew that he was carrying out a wrong plan. His physical strength was great, but he did not have enough spiritual strength to free himself from this snare. We can draw this conclusion from what we read about him.

Verses 10-11 | The Feast Starts

10 Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this. 11 When they saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.

Once the way down is taken, it goes from bad to worse. Samson, in the words of Psalm 1, puts himself here "in the seat of scoffers" (Psa 1:1). This is partly due to the powerless performance of his father. He did make a protest, but he adapted himself further to the wishes of his son. A strong protest without a consistent attitude is unsuccessful. A proverb in Proverbs 29 warns against such an attitude: "A slave will not be instructed by words [alone]; for though he understands, there will be no response" (Pro 29:19).

Samson is already so far under Philistine influence, that he organizes a feast according to the customs that are common among Philistine youth. It is a feast in which the world can participate. It is held in accordance with

the insights and standards of a new generation. For young believers there is always the danger of celebrating in a way that is customary in the world. The expression 'they all do it like this' can be heard among young people.

In this way, the masses are followed in fashion, in celebrating and also in organizing the meetings of the church. What the Word of God has to say about all these things is hardly asked anymore. Anyone who wants to place these things in the light of the Bible will be confronted with remarks such as 'outdated' or 'not of this time'.

Samson also doesn't wonder how God wants him to proceed. He can't do that either, because he is working on the wrong case. He cannot expect anything else now but to be given the wrong means. But not only that. He has come to marry one woman, but he gets thirty companions added.

This means that if you reach a compromise on one point, you will adopt that attitude on many more points. Whoever allows one Philistine principle, adopts more and more. More and more useful arguments are arising. Such reasoning then becomes 'spiritual friends'.

Verses 12-14 | The Riddle

12 Then Samson said to them, "Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. 13 But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Propound your riddle, that we may hear it." 14 So he said to them,

*"Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet."
But they could not tell the riddle in three days.*

Then Samson uses an experience he gained through the Spirit of God to amuse the Philistines. Philistines are people who can never solve such a riddle themselves. They cannot possibly understand that life can come from death. They may be able to give the right answers. However, this can only be done by borrowing or stealing the answers from others, but this is also acting 'like a Philistine'.

We must be able to solve the riddle. Whoever solves the riddle will get different clothes. This is the reward that is promised. Changing clothes is a picture of changing lifestyle habits. Clothes we can see; they belong to the part of man that is visible.

We can look at the riddle from the side of God. Then it means that our lives will change as we gain a real understanding of the fact that the death of the Lord Jesus life has come forth for us. This will affect our attitude and behavior, everything that people see of us. We will show a new style of life.

Solving the riddle must be the result of inner, spiritual exercise. If we have come this far, we learn to see that nothing has any value if we have not received it through the death of Christ. The result of this is visible in the way we interact with each other within the family or the local church: in love from which food and sweetness originate.

However, if we look at the riddle from Samson's side, we see that he represents someone who communicates a 'spiritual' experience as a kind of entertainment to the religious world. If the riddle is not guessed, Samson is given thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. From whom? From the Philistines. It will not bring him profit, but loss.

Someone who shows off his experiences runs the risk of taking over the habits and behavior of the Christian world. Even if the riddle is solved in a Philistine way, the result is not that the one who solves the riddle changes by it. We see what happens with Samson. What he finally did was to provide the Philistines with a number of extra Philistine clothes (verse 19). The changing is not a substantial change.

But now to the meaning of the riddle. What does it represent? The devil is the eater, the lion. A conquered lion provides 'food', spiritual food. On the cross the lion is defeated. The Lord Jesus destroyed on the cross by death "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). As a result, the treasures of God have opened and we can feed ourselves with all the spiritual delicacies that result from the victory of the Lord Jesus. Applied to our own experience a victory over the devil gives strength and refreshment.

Verses 15-18 | How the Riddle Is Solved

*15 Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, so that he will tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not [so]?" 16 Samson's wife wept before him and said, "You only hate me, and you do not love me; you have propounded a riddle to the sons of my people, and have not told [it] to me." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told [it] to my father or mother; so should I tell you?" 17 However she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. And on the seventh day he told her because she pressed him so hard. She then told the riddle to the sons of her people. 18 So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, "What is sweeter than honey?
And what is stronger than a lion?"
And he said to them,
"If you had not plowed with my heifer,
You would not have found out my riddle."*

The way in which the Philistines work to find the solution to the riddle shows their merciless character. They threaten Samson's wife with burning if she doesn't take the solution from him and pass it on to them. The woman shows that, despite a connection with Samson, she has remained essentially a Philistine woman. Her contact with him did not affect her heart. She still feels one with the Philistines and speaks in verse 16 of "the sons of my people".

She blackmails him with one of the strongest weapons a woman has: her emotions. The strong Samson is not resistant to this. He becomes a poor, weak Samson who cannot keep secrets. This will happen again later and then it will be fatal to him. From both cases we can learn that something that we allow as an illicit 'partner' – in the sense of illicit ideas, behaviors, connections – in our lives, becomes the traitor of our secret.

Betrayal here is hooking up with the enemy. The betrayal consists in the application in this, that we know the meaning of the riddle as a believer, but that we treat it the way the enemies treat it. So it does not bring about any real change in our lives.

Samson did not have much joy at the whole feast. There's nothing festive about your wife trying with tears to fidget a secret you want to keep

to yourself. The whole relationship makes it clear that they both live for themselves. Yet the most affected person in this story is the woman. She did not look up Samson, but he wanted her. Through his performance he makes sure that the feast is not an undivided pleasure to her either.

That's still the practice today. When a believer and an unbeliever marry, the victim is the unbeliever. The unbeliever thinks to marry someone with whom he/she can have fun in life. Such a person does not marry a Christian but a wife/husband. Soon it turns out that the believer, if he still attaches any value to the faith, does not want to go to all kinds of occasions or friends where the unbeliever wants to go to. Of course, this was discussed in the time before marriage, but the reality only really presents itself when one is married a bit longer.

Verses 19-20 | The Reward

19 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes [of clothes] to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house. 20 But Samson's wife was [given] to his companion who had been his friend.

Samson is the loser. He first loses the challenge related to the riddle. He has to keep the agreement and has to give thirty pieces of clothing. For that he goes to Ashkelon, one of the five Philistine cities. There he kills thirty men and gives their clothes to those who have given the solution of the riddle. The application is that while 'the riddle' of the cross of the Lord Jesus can be 'answered' by unbelief, this does not really change lives inwardly. The clothing remains Philistine.

It is remarkable that here we read again that the Spirit of the LORD comes upon Samson mightily, while he is still busy fulfilling an agreement he should never have made. Possibly this has to do with the fact that here he is fighting the enemies of God's people and is therefore busy with the execution of his actual task.

He also loses his wife. She is given to another. His father-in-law has no idea whether Samson will ever come back. The man, when he gave his daughter to another person, did not suspect what the consequences would be for him and his daughter.

Judges 15

Introduction

This chapter describes – in a practical sense – the end of Samson’s service to God. The last verse makes this clear. In the next chapter Samson is no longer recognized by God as His servant, although He uses him one more time.

Verses 1-2 | The Connection Disconnected

1 But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said, “I will go in to my wife in [her] room.” But her father did not let him enter. 2 Her father said, “I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead.”

When his anger has calmed down a bit, Samson returns to his wife to complete the wedding by having relations with her. He takes a young goat with him, probably to celebrate with. These are the days of the wheat harvest, which takes place in late May, early June and is accompanied by all kinds of festivities.

In the spiritual application, the wheat harvest tells something about the Lord Jesus and the fruit of His work on the cross. In John 12 He says: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). In the days when the wheat is ripe to be harvested, Samson goes to visit his Philistine wife to confirm his relationship with her! Spiritually, this may mean the following. Someone who is a Nazirite must realize, by seeing the fruit of the Lord Jesus’ work, that it is unthinkable to connect with ‘something’ that is not based on that work.

In any case, it is inconceivable that God should consent in this connection. It is unimaginable that a Nazirite should be married to a Philistine! God prevents this marriage from being definitively concluded. But Philistines are always willing to make a new connection. The father offers him another daughter, even more attractive than the first one. Samson does not go into this. He feels cheated and wants to avenge himself.

Verses 3-5 | The Revenge of Samson

3 Samson then said to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm." 4 Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned [the foxes] tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails. 5 When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards [and] groves.

The connection with the Philistines has only brought Samson misery. He is personally hurt and acts in carnal anger. Here is no mention of the Spirit of the LORD who comes upon Samson. He uses his special power to catch foxes, or rather jackals. These are unclean animals that a Jew, and certainly a Nazirite, do not touch. Foxes in the Bible are related to weakness (Neh 4:3) and sins (Song 2:15). He makes the unclean fox a servant of his revenge. Unclean, sinful means are more often used to express indignation.

The meaning of a torch depends on who lights it. If God does, it has a positive meaning, for example in Genesis 15 (Gen 15:17). Here Samson lights it and it speaks of carnal anger. In James 3 a comparison is made between fire and the human tongue: "See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the [very] world of iniquity" (Jam 3:5b-6a). The fire can only do its job well if it is kept under control, just like the tongue. There must be self-control. Those who let themselves go, like Samson, and do not keep their tongues under control, can cause the greatest disasters, both a world war and a brotherly strife.

Here the fire is connected to the tail. In the Bible, the tail is sometimes used to indicate a false teaching: "And the prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail" (Isa 9:15b; cf. Rev 9:10-19). Samson has descended far below his dignity as a Nazirite. What a contrast between Samson and his 300 and Gideon and his 300.

Let us summarize once again what is being represented in Samson's actions. Foxes or jackals are animals that rout the earth and feed on corruption. They represent the unclean, sinful means that a believer can use to take revenge for injustice suffered. This can happen, for example, with the fire of the tongue, by spreading lies and evil rumor.

The result of Samson's actions is that the proceeds of the land are destroyed. Both the standing corn and what has already been mown, and even the vineyards and olive trees, are set on fire as a result of Samson's anger and can no longer serve as food. Samson should have chased the Philistines away and given the enjoyment of the land's proceeds to his fellow countrymen.

How often has personal struggle been the cause of a destruction of the blessing that could have been enjoyed? In many local churches there is great unrest because the believers are engaged in a battle of words among themselves. The fruit of the land represents the blessings with which the Christian is blessed in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph 1:3). This fruit is richly present. We live as it were 'in the days of wheat harvest' (verse 1).

Instead of fighting the enemy to save the proceeds of the land from his hand, a battle of words is waged, "which is useless [and leads] to the ruin of the hearers" (2Tim 2:14). The result is that there is nothing to enjoy. The cause of all this is 'only' an offended mind that is unable to bring the matter before the Lord. Instead of together with Him seeking for a solution, he goes to work himself in a carnal way.

Verses 6-8 | Revenge Answered With Revenge

6 Then the Philistines said, "Who did this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. 7 Samson said to them, "Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit." 8 He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

Once the Philistines know the reason for Samson's revenge, his wife, and also her father, still find the fate that is said to her in Judges 14 (Jdg 14:15). Samson is once again acting out of feelings of revenge, but these are now also more justified. It is not merely a question of being personally hurt, but the retribution of a brutal act. Samson engages in a direct and open battle with the enemy. In a few words, it is said that he has achieved an enormous victory.

Then he goes to live in the cleft of the rock of Etam. A rock is a suitable place to live for a powerless people, like the shephanim (or coney or badgers) (Pro 30:26), and also for all people with 'long hair'. Moses also knew that place (Exo 33:21-22). The rock is a picture of Christ (1Cor 10:4), Who is represented here as the abode of faith, the true abode of the Nazirites.

Samson does not return to his father's house as he did before (Jdg 14:19), but goes to live in this place independently. He dwells there separated from the Philistines, and also separated from God's faithless people.

Verses 9-13 | The Philistines and the Men of Judah

9 Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out in Lehi. 10 The men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" And they said, "We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us." 11 Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." 12 They said to him, "We have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me." 13 So they said to him, "No, but we will bind you fast and give you into their hands; yet surely we will not kill you." Then they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

After the great stroke that Samson inflicted on the Philistines, it is now their turn to take revenge. It is Judah who has to pay in return for what Samson did to them. In addition to the direct cause for the Philistines to rise, this action can also be applied spiritually. When Samson has taken his place of separation in the cleft of the rock of Etam, the enemies become active. A faithful Christian is much more a target of the enemy's attacks than someone who does not take his life as a Christian so seriously.

The men of Judah inquire about the plans of the Philistines. They are told that they have come to bind Samson. The Philistines always aim to bind the Nazirite. In its spiritual application, this is always one of the enemy's most important goals. In professing Christianity it even happened to the Holy Spirit: He is restricted.

Even worse than what the Philistines plan is Judah's attitude. Apparently they no longer suffer under the rule of the Philistines. The yoke no longer presses because they have reconciled to it and accepted it. They blame Samson for bringing them into such a conflict with the enemy, who is so kind to them. They come to him with the words: "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us?" (verse 11). That low Judah has sunk. Judah means 'praise', 'one who praises God'. Isn't it mind-boggling that the tribe with such a name expresses itself in such a way?

This speaks of a complete acceptance of clericalism and traditionalism. The religion in which the flesh has a greater or lesser say has become general. This is the case in professing Christianity everywhere where the distinction between clergy and lay people has become an established fact; where the service is determined by one man or a select group; where proposals are dealt with democratically; where worship, the service of praise, takes place along predetermined lines.

Anyone who reads well will see that this not only applies to certain ecclesiastical directions, but also applies equally to all kinds of other religious communities. It is not only in the official structure, although the characteristics there are most recognizable. It also applies to places where, although no structures exist officially, certain structures do exist as a result of ingrained habits.

To be perfectly clear, I am talking about the characteristics of a system, official or unofficial, and not the people who are part of it. Fortunately, there are many sincere Christians who serve God devotedly, but are not aware of the evil attached to such systems.

It is God's grace when He sends a deliverer, like Samson here. But Samson is experienced as a troublemaker. Anyone who denounces all kinds of carnal things that have been given a place in personal or communal service to God will be told that he is going against the prevailing rules and forms. For example, he is told that he should not be too extreme. The lukewarmness is justified.

Instead of making themselves one with their hero and getting rid of their common enemy, the men of Judah align themselves with the Philistines and unite with their goal. They have no appreciation whatsoever for the

judge given to them by God. Here Judah does not show the dignity of the blessing Jacob pronounces on him (Gen 49:8-12). In the history of Judah are more of such low points (Gen 37:23-28; 38:1-26).

Samson does not want to fight his brothers, however deep they may have sunk and how much they essentially align themselves with their enemy. In the same way, we must not fight against our brothers, but against the principles that imprison them and with which they have even reconciled.

Samson asks for an assurance that they will not attack him, otherwise he will be forced to defend himself with all the consequences for the Judeans. He is guaranteed that this will not happen. All they want to do is bind him fast with new ropes and deliver him into the hand of the Philistines. What is happening here is truly astonishing. The men of Judah choose the side of the Philistines and are working to execute the plans of the enemy!

Samson must be kept from his vocation at all costs. New ropes are, according to them, the appropriate means for this. As an application, we can say that committed Christians are being persuaded, especially by new, popular, human means, to give up their Nazirite occupation. The word for ropes comes from 'braiding' and reflects the idea it is a human product.

Samson lets himself be bound and gives in to their wishes, because he does not want to use his strength, or abuse it, by fighting against his people.

Verse 14 | Freed From the New Ropes

14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.

When the men of Judah bring Samson to the Philistines, they shout for joy. They think they have their hated enemy in their power. However, the joy is short-lived, for "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily". When human means by which a Nazirite can be bound come into contact with the Spirit of God and the Word of God, they are "as flax that is burned with fire". The putting into practice of the call in 1 Peter 4 makes all the Philistine ropes, figuratively speaking, turn to ashes. We are encouraged there with the words: "Whoever speaks, [is to do so] as one who is speaking the

utterances of God; whoever serves [is to do so] as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies" (1Pet 4:11a).

This frees everyone, so that everyone can exercise his gift as solely responsible to the Giver, regardless of any human appointment or intervention. That is what Paul means when he writes about his apostleship: "Paul, an apostle (not [sent] from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)" (Gal 1:1). With this he indicates that in the exercise of his apostleship he is free from all 'Philistine ropes'.

That certainly does not mean that we have nothing to do with others and their comments about our service. For example, in the church, "let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment" (1Cor 14:29). But that is something else than deciding in advance who should say something and what should be said in the church. This should not be determined by others, because only the Holy Spirit may have a say in this.

Verses 15-17 | A Fresh Jawbone of a Donkey

*15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it. 16 Then Samson said,
"With the jawbone of a donkey,
Heaps upon heaps,
With the jawbone of a donkey
I have killed a thousand men."
17 When he had finished speaking, he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place Ramath-lehi.*

Samson frees himself from the new ropes by the power of the Spirit. To defeat his enemies he uses a fresh jawbone of a donkey. This shows the weakness of the instrument in contrast to the result. No one can say that Samson's victory is the result of a great weapon. It is a 'fresh' weapon, not a 'dry' one (cf. Eze 37:1-2).

The donkey is dead, but the power of life is still present in the bone, as it were. This speaks of the life that the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus gave us and through which we are able to achieve victories. This means that we have acknowledged the judgment about ourselves. Man by nature is aptly compared with a donkey (Exo 13:13).

When Samson has gained the victory, he throws away his weapon. He does not want to keep it, it should not become a snare for him, like the ephod for Gideon (Jdg 8:27). The weapon has served the purpose and that is enough. This principle is important, both for the person used to serve and for those served. Often the ‘poor’ instrument God wanted to use in His grace is honored. We hear expressions such as ‘what a speaker’ and ‘what a charisma’.

An example of how it should be is given in the book of Acts, chapter 8. After Philip proclaimed the gospel to the eunuch and baptized him, “the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). Philip has done his service. He does not need a tribute and gets a different field of work. And the eunuch? He no longer has an eye for Philip, he does not even miss him, because he has received the Lord Jesus in his heart and that is more than enough.

Verses 18-19 | Spring of Him Who Called

18 Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the LORD and said, “You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” 19 But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day.

After his impressive victory Samson becomes very thirsty, that thirsty, that he is afraid he will die. In his distress he calls to God. His prayer, the first prayer mentioned of him (!), is short and powerful. First we see that he gives glory to God for the victory: “You have.” That’s beautiful. Unfortunately, his faith falls short and he complains that he will die, but now of thirst, and that he will fall into the hands of the enemy.

We can learn a few things from this. In the first place that battle does not quench thirst. We may gain victories for the Lord, but the real refreshment lies not in victory, but in the Lord Himself. Then we see that having thirst is a challenge to ask God for an outcome, for He likes to hear. God has already given an outcome before when a whole people were thirsty (Exo 17:1-7).

Samson calls twice in total to God, here in verse 18 and in Judges 16 (Jdg 16:20). Both times he is heard. If we consider that the time Samson lives in is comparable to the last days and hard times mentioned in 2 Timothy 3 (2Tim 3:1-5), then we have a great encouragement here. We see that calling upon the Name of the Lord is a special spring for the last days. En-hakkore means spring of him who called.

God opens that spring for everyone who calls. Those who drink from it will experience the power that Samson experiences. Life strength and revival are coming again. The only possibility to experience a personal or communal revival lies in:

1. realizing that we are thirsty;
2. in calling to God in our distress;
3. in drinking from the spring which God opens.

It is as if the author of this book wants to focus our special attention on it when he says that the “spring of him who called” is in Lehi is “to this day”. Literally it means that the spring is still there at the time this book is written. The spiritual meaning of this expression and the spiritual power that emanates from it is surely that the spring that God has made available is always available to everyone who calls, also today.

John 4 has been mentioned before, where the Lord Jesus, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, points to the spring of living water “springing up to eternal life” (Jn 4:14). Drinking from the spring He has made accessible brings ‘him who calls’ in connection with eternal life. Eternal life is life in the atmosphere of the Father and the Son in which the believer is brought by knowing the Father and the Son (Jn 17:3).

Eternal life is also the Lord Jesus Himself (1Jn 5:20). This is where the Holy Spirit will bring him who calls and what will quench his thirst. Eternal life cannot be affected by decay or apostasy. Precisely the letter that speaks of last days and hard times begins by pointing out “the promise of life in Jesus Christ” (2Tim 1:1,9).

This directs our eye on the Lord Jesus and everything found in Him. This gives an inner satisfaction that is greater than the most resounding victory.

Verse 20 | Duration of Samson's Leadership

| *20 So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.*

Samson is a different kind of deliverer than his predecessors. He judges Israel while the Philistines rule. It is possible that Samson returned to the rock of Etam (verse 8) to perform his function as a judge. The period in which he leads Israel, probably lay between 1075-1055 BC, a time in which Samuel – born about 1080 BC – also started to become active.

For God, the history of Samson ends here. The statement in this verse follows on the rock as residence (verse 8), an open battle with the Philistines (verse 15) and the rock from which water flows (verse 19). These are situations in which he has become detached from the enemy and can lead Israel. What follows is his total fall.

In Judges 14-15 a total of six acts of Samson are mentioned:

1. The tearing of a young lion (Jdg 14:6);
2. The killing of thirty Philistines (Jdg 14:19);
3. His action with the three hundred foxes (Jdg 15:4-5);
4. His revenge on the Philistines (Jdg 15:8);
5. Deliverance from his ropes (Jdg 15:14);
6. The killing of a thousand Philistines (Jdg 15:15).

Samson has one too short for the number seven, the number of completeness.

Judges 16

Introduction

The secret of power can never be communicated to people who do not possess this power themselves. No one has ever understood the source of power and authority of the Lord Jesus. Mary of Bethany is the only example of a heart that has understood Him. His heart was full of compassion for every sorrow, but there is no one who has ever felt, let alone understood His sorrow.

Samson is totally different from the Lord. He has only been out on his own pleasures and has revealed the secret of his strength and with it lost the power to be a Nazirite any longer. There are more contrasts between the Lord Jesus and Samson than similarities, as this last chapter on Samson in particular shows us. The latest events in Samson's life confirm his great physical strength and his great weakness for women.

Verses 1-3 | Samson in Gaza

1 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. 2 [When it was told] to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded [the place] and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "[Let us wait] until the morning light, then we will kill him." 3 Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron.

It is not clear from the story why Samson is going to Gaza. Gaza is a stronghold of the Philistines. Everyone should recognize him there when he with his long hair walks through the streets. Awe for his great strength ensures that no one dares to do anything to him, the feared enemy. His visit to this city was not commissioned by God. Nothing shows that he is in Gaza to eradicate this hotbed of Philistine activity.

It seems that he has an outing. This may be the reason for his visit to a harlot. David also came to adultery because he spent his time in idleness,

while he should have been at the head of the army to lead it into war (2Sam 11:1-5). Samson has still not learned to control his passions; he gives them free rein. In Judges 14 he still works 'neatly' by observing normal manners, here he follows only his lusts, of which he himself becomes a victim.

The harlot is a Philistine harlot and thus a picture of the great Babylon or the roman-catholic church, which is called "the great harlot" (Rev 17:1). The fact that the confessing church is presented as a harlot shows how far she has deviated from her original state. Paul points to the beginning of that deviation when he compares the church to a pure virgin who is connected to Christ, but who by the devil's temptation has become unfaithful to Him (2Cor 11:2-3). The final result of this unfaithfulness is seen in Revelation 17-18.

Any believer who forgets that he is a Nazirite and thinks that he can enter unpunished, without a command from God, the system God is going to judge, is in danger to perish with this system. This is what happened to Samson in the end. He comes to terms with the system he had to fight against by making himself one with that system. Although he still has the strength to free himself here, he has, by uniting himself with this Philistine harlot, laid the germ of his ruin.

It seems to be possible that someone can still have any strength if he has sacrificed his conscience in this way. He has not yet lost his strength because he has not yet revealed the secret of it. Only God and Samson know about it. Indeed, it is possible that a person living in sin may have some time of success in his service to God. Unfortunately, these successes are used as a cover for sin and not to come to a thorough and total confession of sin.

Samson uses his power here only to free himself and forgets the purpose for which God has given him that power. No enemy is defeated, nor has his people benefitted from it. Samson behaves here as a mere powerhouse. He uses his strength because he is forced to flee himself and not to force the Philistines to flee.

He will return to Gaza later, not to show his strength, but as a blind prisoner (verse 21). This is because he does not reach Hebron. He walks with the doors on his shoulders in the direction of Hebron, but he doesn't get there. Hebron means 'fellowship'. Samson fails, so to speak, in his return to fel-

lowship with God. He does not come to a complete confession of guilt, because he does not give up his wrong connections. His outer deliverance is not a consequence of an inner self-judgment before God. His fellowship with God has not been restored and there is no self-judgment because of the sins committed.

Returning to God means condemning that which led him to sin, the root of it. In his heart he did not judge the sin committed, but continued to cherish it. This can only be at the expense of fellowship with God. To all who are part of the great Babylon, the nominal Christian church, comes the call: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues” (Rev 18:4). Separation from evil must be both external and internal. With Samson in this case it is only external. He remains internally connected to it.

Verse 4 | Samson’s New Love

4 After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Because he has not been restored to fellowship with God, the next and deeper fall is obvious. The weak arms of a woman appear to be stronger for Samson than the gates of Gaza. Sorek means ‘exquisite vine’. The name Delilah means ‘the longingly yearning’. Together they represent the religious world, which unites itself with the wicked world and its pleasures. It is the people who are typified by Paul in this way: “Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power” (2Tim 3:4b-5a). They are people of whom the Philistines are an example.

Samson falls in love with someone who proposes this principle. Here the real danger becomes visible that love can arise for an enemy that we have to fight according to the Bible, which is as God commands. Something like this happens if we do not keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 1:21a). What Samson does here goes beyond his connection with the harlot in verses 1-3. That was a short-lived connection.

Samson has gone down the sloping path, becoming increasingly tangled in the snares of the enemy. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon warns his

son over and over again against the strange woman and shows the consequences for everyone who gets involved with her. It is invariably a descent “to the chambers of death” (Pro 7:25-27; 2:16-19; 5:5).

Verse 5 | The Enemy Sees His Chance

5 The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Entice him, and see where his great strength [lies] and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred [pieces] of silver.”

The Philistines are determined to find out where Samson’s great strength lies. They want to find out the origin of the secret and are prepared to pay a high price for it. The devil is always willing to pay a high price to deprive a Nazirite of his dedication, and thus of his strength. He makes every effort to rid anyone who really wants to be a Nazirite, of his separation to God, the true strength of Christian life.

Delilah is only guided by money. With this she shows herself in heart and soul a Philistine, although she is not mentioned anywhere like that. In her character is nothing attractive. And yet Samson loves her. When it comes to physical strength, Samson has won every battle with the Philistines. But Samson has lost all confrontation with the Philistines when an appeal is made to his passion. The three Philistine women provide the proof (Jdg 14:1-2; 16:1; 16:4). Every time he succumbs to the means of seduction. The devil is more to be feared by us when he presents himself as “an angel of light” (2Cor 11:14), than when he rages as “a roaring lion” (1Pet 5:8).

Verses 6-9 | First Phase in Revealing the Secret

6 So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you.” 7 Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any [other] man.” 8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9 Now she had [men] lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.

It can hardly be otherwise, or Samson senses what Delilah is after. He has already had an experience with a Philistine woman who has managed to get him to tell her the solution to his riddle. If he has forgotten this, he must be clear, through Delilah's actions, what her ultimate goal is. He must have known that she is out to destroy him.

Again and again she deceives him. Each time he reveals a little more of his secret. He gets closer and closer to the core, until he loses everything. It's like a lock that has a hatch under water that can be opened. Invisible the water enters the lock, until the level is equal to the sea. The lock can then be opened with ease. We can secretly allow things into our hearts without condemning them. If that happens, we will eventually become completely equal to the world.

Instead of feeling safe and protected by Samson's great strength, Delilah asks what it takes to bind him in such a way that he can't compete with it with his strength. Before revealing his secret, he first turns around the truth and tells lies. He tells her that seven fresh cords, which have not been dried, will make him strengthless. Perhaps Samson thought about the cords with which the men of Judah had bound him. He then relies on an earlier victory and not on God.

When he is bound in this way and Delilah calls the Philistines to capture him, he breaks the cords and frees himself. But a snare is laid around his soul, which is slowly being tightened. He has revealed a first piece of his secret by calling the number seven, after the number of locks of his hair (verses 13,19).

Verses 10-12 | Second Phase in Revealing the Secret

10 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound." 11 He said to her, "If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any [other] man." 12 So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" For the [men] were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.

Delilah accuses him of lies and deceit, and not entirely wrongly. Samson is in a position where he cannot speak freely about the secret of his strength.

He realizes that it will be abused. But instead of fleeing from a place where he doesn't belong, he resorts to excuses to stay there anyway.

How many times has it been like this with us? We were in a place we knew we should not be there. Then we were asked a question about faith. We turned around and gave an evasive answer. By giving the real answer we would have been discovered to ourselves and it would have shown us that we did not belong there.

In such a situation, there may also be a moment when we no longer beat around the bush on the truth and openly tell what we believe. But unfortunately, because we haven't 'fled' before, this is being used by others to ridicule us. Our testimony is no longer of any value and becomes a mockery and entertainment. That's how it went with Samson.

Delila's second attempt can take place because Samson stayed there hanging around. The snare that is strained around his soul is tightened more firmly. In his answer to Delilah he reveals another piece of his secret. He talks about "new ropes, which have not been used".

In Judges 15 an attempt was also made to tie him with new ropes (Jdg 15:13). That failed. Here Samson adds that these ropes must never have been used before, i.e. they are specially made to be used only for this purpose. Here we can see a reference to his own ordination as a Nazirite from the very beginning of his life.

This is the second step toward revealing his secret, but again not the full reality about the secret of his strength. Yet he has already touched on two things in connection with it:

1. that he is wholly for the Lord;
2. that from birth he is only for the Lord (not for anything or anyone else).

Verses 13-14 | Third Phase in Revealing the Secret

13 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web [and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man." 14 So while he slept, Delilah took the seven

locks of his hair and wove them into the web]. And she fastened [it] with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.

Delilah is tireless in her attempts to find out the secret of his strength. She does not give up. That's not necessary because Samson doesn't leave. He is entangled in the net that she has stretched before his feet, because he does not do what David did: "My eyes are continually toward the LORD, for He will pluck my feet out of the net" (Psa 25:15). Because his eyes are on Delilah, she can go on.

And she does, because the money smiles at her. Again she accuses him of lies and deceit and asks again how he may be bound. The answer he is giving now comes close to revealing his secret. He points to the locks of his hair. It is that long that it can be woven. He allows her to work his hair with her loom, so that his hair is woven into a whole with her work.

The spiritual lesson that lies in this is telling. What Samson does is to apply to the Christian who, in his vocation as a Nazirite, shows an interest in the attractiveness of an embellished and dressed up religious world. He gets involved in this and takes over its methods. In this way the Nazirite then unites himself with the work of the religious world. He stands together with people who are guided by Philistine principles on the same platform; he is committed to the same goal. Only by name, these people possess the life of Christ, not in reality.

Many Philistine 'webs' are used, so that the saints will participate in this weaving and finally be deprived of their strength. Take politics. Someone can participate with the best motives, but he binds himself to people of the world. They want to commit themselves to an excellent job. They want to cleanse the world of all kinds of injustice and create a righteous society. Again and again such believers 'wake up' when proposals are made that go against the Bible. It always appears that they have to deal with the enemies of the cross. They hear the crying of their conscience: "The Philistines are upon you!"

But no matter how Samson tries to free himself, this time the web sticks to him as proof that he is connected to her work. He is no longer really free.

Verses 15-17 | Fourth Phase: The Secret Revealed

15 Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is." 16 It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. 17 So he told her all [that was] in his heart and said to her, "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any [other] man."

Three times he was able to free himself, the third time only half. Because he doesn't break the connection, now the final fall comes. The previous times Delilah always asked how she might bind him. This time she uses all the persuasive power she has as a woman. She no longer talks, like other times, about a method of binding him, but strikes him in his heart by questioning his love for her. After all, he still hasn't told her the secret of his strength. This way she pressed him for many days.

Samson has little joy anymore in his dealings with Delilah. This has already happened to the woman from Timna. He did not learn from that either. What emerges from Delilah is not open enmity, but something that looks attractive and can talk seductively. Eventually he succumbs to the psychological pressure. He reveals the secret that otherwise she would never have found out. For who could think that his strength lies in his long hair, a clear proof of weakness, the weakness of a woman?

This is still the case. Strong young people who served God in great dedication have been deluded by the world and let down the path of disobedience. As a result, they have lost their strength, their freedom to serve and their spiritual discernment. The light that was in them has become darkness.

Samson reveals his secret because he has lost his fellowship with God. This is how he comes to this great folly, even though he has been awakened so many times by Delilah. Surely it should be clear to him what her intentions are, shouldn't it?

But whoever lets himself be carried away by the world loses all understanding of normal and also common sense. His strength lies in his long

hair, behind which his personality, as it were, hides. The only strength lies in being 'hidden'. Dependence on and dedication to Christ are the hidden strength of the believer to live as a Nazirite. This applies to both personal and communal life.

Verses 18-21 | Samson Overpowered

18 When Delilah saw that he had told her all [that was] in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all [that is] in his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. 19 She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. 20 She said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. 21 Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.

Delilah senses flawlessly that this time he is speaking the truth. Samson's previous suggestion had already been different from the first two. The first two times he has let himself be bound. The third time he didn't talk about binding, but about weaving his hair. After that, it is not difficult for her to realize that he has now exposed his whole heart.

She warns the Philistine lords again, this time apparently with the announcement that they can now take the money with them, because for her the result is clear. Then she binds him, not with ropes, not with the web, but with the warmth of her lap, on which he falls asleep. There he feels her warmth and that will be his final downfall. With all his strength he is not equal to the tricks of a woman, under whose temptation and enchantment he has come.

When Samson sleeps, Delilah calls for a man and has him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Now she has him in her power. Her caresses turn into blows and torments. For the fourth time, her call sounds: "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" This is followed by the deeply tragic drama of a now powerless Samson, who, after waking up, is under the impression that he is still as strong as ever. It seems that he has reconciled himself with

the idea that he would be attacked every time, but also that, given the previous times, he has come to count on an everlasting supremacy of strength. Just as Samson's dealings with the Philistine Delilah become disastrous, so flirting with the unholy principles of the world becomes disastrous for every child of God. The same goes for the church. Deprived of her strength, she pretends that all strength is still present. A powerless church tries to let itself be spoken of and she doesn't know that there is no strength at all because the Spirit was first saddened and then quenched.

This is reflected in the sad situation of the church in Laodicea of which it is said "and you do not know" (Rev 3:17), as it says of Samson "but he did not know" (verse 20). The church in Laodicea is blind to their own situation. They moderate themselves to be spiritually high, but the Lord disgusts with her.

From Ephraim, meaning the ten tribes, it says: "Ephraim mixes himself with the nations; Ephraim has become a cake not turned. Strangers devour his strength, yet he does not know [it]; gray hairs also are sprinkled on him, yet he does not know [it]" (Hos 7:8-9). Do we see the parallel between Ephraim and Samson? The strength of both of them has disappeared due to bad company and both did not know it.

In addition to a warning for the local church, this history also contains a warning for faithful, dedicated brethren who are useful in the service. This warning is that they should not forget that they are dependent on God. They run the risk of thinking that their knowledge of Scripture would make them unassailable to the influence of the flattery of the Christian world if they were to enter this field without God's command. They think that their knowledge of the Scriptures will save them from that flattery and will free them from possible wrong connections.

Maybe they have said 'no' to proposals to take part in something that they saw could not be done. But if they don't leave the environment where they have to say 'no' each time, the moment comes when they say 'yes'. Then the separation to God and the obedience to His Word are given up and the strength also disappears. Perhaps they still think that the Lord is with them, but the result is that they are captured, just like Samson, and that they lose their understanding of Scripture, just as Samson lost his sight.

He who has carried away the doors of the city gate of Gaza, is brought in as a prisoner through the same gate. In the Bible for the first time there is talk of a prison with Joseph, who ended up in it himself. But he was brought into it because of his faithfulness. Samson is forced to use what is left of his strength in prison in the service of the Philistines to feed them and thereby provide them with strength. What a sad end of a person who had been set and trained by God to the exact opposite task.

In addition this this, a few words about Revelation 3. There we read: "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Rev 3:11). The expression 'so that no one will take your crown' is not only about the future, but also about today. We can connect the crown with our dedication to the Lord, as it can also become visible in a church.

The church as a whole has long since lost that crown. Her secret is no longer hidden with her; she did not remain separated from the world. She has admitted the world into her midst, which is reflected in having rules, means and conditions that all originate in the thinking of the natural human being. As a result, religion, the serving of God, is adapted to the norms and values of the human without God.

Any local church that opens up to this process, as Samson opened up to it, will slip into a church that has the characteristics of Laodicea. It looks like Samson when he lost his strength and fell into the hands of the Philistines: a shaved Nazirite (naked), who is poor and blind (Rev 3:17).

Verses 22-24 | Beginning of the Restoration

22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off. 23 Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said,

"Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands."

24 When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said,

"Our god has given our enemy into our hands,

Even the destroyer of our country,

Who has slain many of us."

Undoubtedly sorrow, remorse and repentance have brought about a change in Samson's heart, not so much in his external characteristics as

in his heart. Now that his eyes, which have brought him to his deep fall, are removed, he is freed from that which brought him on the wrong path. In the midst of the sad prison experiences, bound and blind, the characteristics of being a Nazirite slowly reappear. His hair starts to grow again. The message that lies in this is the great encouragement that after all human failures God always gives the possibility of restoration.

So, thank God, Samson's history does not end with the endless turning around of the millstone in the prison. God can use His so deeply sunken servant yet again. He does so at the time when the victory over Samson is attributed to the Philistine idol, although they acknowledge that Samson caused great devastation.

It is now becoming a matter between God and the idols. For Samson fell into their hands not because of their god Dagon, but because the God of Israel had handed him over to them. God will use Samson for the maintenance of His honor, to make it clear that there is only one God and that is He, the God of Samson – the God of Israel!

Verse 25 | Samson, a Spectacle

25 It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.

Before he does his last heroic deed, the lords let Samson be picked up to have fun with him and mock him. He must make sure that they have fun. God uses this opportunity to inflict the greatest blow of all time on the Philistines. However, this does not alter the fact that the position of Samson as a result of his unfaithfulness is once again made very clear.

Paul says of himself and the other apostles: "We have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men" (1Cor 4:9). However, the reason for this is completely different from Samson's. In the following verse he says that he and the others are fools "for Christ's sake" (1Cor 4:10). He does not care about being laughed at when he speaks of Christ.

Every Christian is a spectacle. The faithful Christian is mocked and laughed at by people because of his faithfulness to Christ; the faithless

Christian is also mocked and laughed at by people, but then because of his unfaithfulness to Christ. Peter speaks of the same: “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if [anyone suffers] as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name” (1Pet 4:14-16). Unfortunately, Samson is not in a position to glorify God, and his suffering is due to his own unfaithfulness, while he serves as a spectacle and comedy for the enemy.

Verses 26-30 | Strengthened Once More

26 Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.” 27 Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing [them]. 28 Then Samson called to the LORD and said, “O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.” 29 Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. 30 And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.

That God can use our failures to His glory is a great miracle. It goes without saying that this does not take away anything from our responsibility. It also shows how much God is beyond our failures and how His glory is even greater because of them.

Although blind, Samson begins to ‘see’ more than he has ever seen. The Philistines think they are dealing with a defeated enemy and think they have nothing left to fear from Samson. As an example of his powerlessness, he is led in by a boy holding his hand. But with his dependence on God, of which his growing hair is an external characteristic, his strength returns and the enemy does not see it. In his humiliation, the thoughts of God have more influence on Samson’s heart than before, in the days of his strength.

The plan arises for him to be taken by the boy to the pillars on which the building rests. The building is full of people celebrating in honor of their god Dagon who has defused their invincible enemy for them.

When Samson stands by the pillars, he prays his second prayer mentioned of him in the Bible. It is not a prayer with which he has God's honor in mind. He asks God to think of him in his search for revenge for his two eyes. This shows that, despite the restoration of his strength, his spiritual life has not yet been restored. This indicates that we may have restored after a deviation, but that we will not get back everything we lost as a result of that deviation. Yet God hears him.

In a way that appeals to our imagination, is described how Samson pushes apart the pillars on which the roof rests and turns the entire building into a dead man's ruin. Samson, blind and bound, is killed in the judgment he brings on his enemies. He has connected himself to the world by listening to it and must now share in the judgment that affects the world. Something similar happens to Jonathan, holding Saul with one hand and David with the other (1Sam 18:1; 20:42b; 31:2).

Samson has successively lost his strength, his freedom, his sight and his life. If someone's death is more important than his life, it says a lot, both of the one and the other. Not much of his life resulted in glory to God. In his death, he made up for some of what he failed to do in his life. He had to learn that his own death was the secret of his strength.

As said, Samson called to God twice, and both times his prayer is linked to the secret of his strength. Judges 15 is about the strength of life (Jdg 15:18-19), here it is about the strength of death. This is what Paul learned: "For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake" (2Cor 4:11). We must also learn this. The moment I accept my death, God's secret strength starts working in me and I become a useful instrument that God can use.

Verse 31 | Burial of Samson and Final Statement

31 Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years.

His history started with parents looking upward; after that it soon went downhill. Now his whole family comes and takes him up to the tomb of his father Manoah. This will also be the end of our lives: despite much unfaithfulness on our part, we will enter into the Father's house through the faithfulness of God.

The history of Samson ends with the statement that he has judged Israel as a judge for twenty years. We say goodbye to him with a reminder of the service he did for God in the midst of His people. For he has served God. He defeated the Philistines and for twenty years ensured order and peace in Israel. Israel's history continues, but God does not forget what Samson did.

We meet him again in the Bible: in Hebrews 11. Perhaps that surprises us. God does not think like us. Samson is allowed to shine between other heroes of faith in the midst of whom God has given him a place. There he, together with those others who have gone before us on the path of faith and have already reached the final goal, calls by his example to us that the path of faith is the path of blessing leading to the final blessing.

Soon we will really see Samson when we are with the Lord Jesus. Together with him we will magnify and glorify the Lord Jesus. He did not do Samson (and also us) according to his (and our) unfaithfulness, but carried out right through it His own plans of grace and blessing.

Together with him we will sing: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev 5:12).

Judges 17

Introduction

The last five chapters of the book, Judges 17-21, form a separate part. They are not a historical sequel to the previous chapters, but show something of the spiritual and social climate within the people of the land during the entire period in which the book of Judges takes place. In those chapters two more histories are described, the first in Judges 17-18, the second in Judges 19-21.

In these sections we do not read about judges. Nor is there any oppression and a period of time is not given. It is very likely that the events described took place at the beginning of the period of judges. This can be deduced from Judges 18 where there is a grandson of Moses (Jdg 18:30) [it is assumed that Manasseh must be Moses], while in Judges 20 the name of Phinehas the high priest is mentioned (Jdg 20:28), a grandson of Aaron, who has already reached adulthood during the wilderness journey. This seems to confirm that both the events of Judges 17-18 and those of Judges 19-21 should be set in the beginning of the period that the judges judged.

The fact that they are described only here is proof that not only the way in which events are depicted is Godly inspired, but also that their classification, the order, is equally Godly inspired. What appears at first sight to be disorder, appears on closer inspection to confirm the perfection of the Word of God. The fact that it is only here that these events are brought to the fore is intended to illustrate the moral and religious fall of the people of God during the entire period covered by the book of Judges.

It is even possible that in time order Judges 17-18 must be placed after Judges 19-21. That first the history of Micah and the tribe Dan is written is a confirmation of this. God wants to show us that leaving or replacing Him (Judges 17-18) also has a dramatic effect on the relationships among His people (Judges 19-21).

The people are controlled by a spirit of self-willingness throughout the entire period of this book. Because there is no inhibitory influence – “in those days there was no king in Israel” (Jdg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) –, gives

that spirit free rein to all kinds of excesses. Is it a miracle then that the people repeatedly deviate from God and sin? These last five chapters thus form the dark background against which everything that takes place in this book must be seen.

In the history of Judges 17-18 we get a painting of the religious decay of the people. In Judges 17 we see how a religious system is set up by a person for the benefit of his family, while Judges 18 describes how this system is introduced in an entire tribe.

God tells us everything without punishing or even expressing His displeasure. The assessment is left to our mental discernment.

What we find in these two chapters are

1. a man-made god,
2. humanly organized worship and
3. a man-made priesthood.

It is a striking description of what we see around us today in ritualistic Christianity.

Verses 1-2 | Micah and His Mother

*1 Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah.
2 He said to his mother, "The eleven hundred [pieces] of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the LORD."*

When we are on holiday in a foreign land and we want to get a good idea of the everyday life of the people, it is best to take a look at an ordinary family. The Spirit of God takes us to a family that has probably not been noticed by any particular achievement. It is a model for the majority of the families in Israel. What we observe there, if we disregard for a moment God's thoughts about family life, is not something that will be upset us.

We see a son who steals money from his mother, but fortunately gives it back. And see how the mother reacts. She blesses her son and even sanctifies a part for the LORD. All of this seems to be blessed by the LORD, for in their house religion they receive even reinforcement from a real Levite. This is how we can look at this family.

However, if we hold this family against the light of the Bible, things will be very different. Before we do that, we have to be aware that we ourselves are also being scrutinized. Otherwise we miss the lesson God wants us to learn through this history. For also “these things happened as examples for us ... and they were written for our instruction” (1Cor 10:6,11). In Micah and his mother the corruption becomes public that can be present in a house or family. This is where sin arises, which will later affect an entire tribe. Sin spreads like leprosy.

It all starts somewhere in the hill country of Ephraim. We have been there before in this book. This area has played an important role in the successes of Ehud, Deborah and Gideon (Jdg 3:27; 4:5; 7:24). The man who lives there listens to the beautiful name Micah, which means “who is equal to the LORD”. Unfortunately, he does not act according to the meaning of his name.

The whole people of Israel should be a ‘Micah’ for the people around them, but it has become a people with a house full of idols, like the house of Micah. It is no different in professing Christianity. Many people adorn themselves with the name ‘Christian’, saying that they belong to Christ, while organizing their lives as they see fit.

It seems that we are dealing here with a single-parent family, as we have so many of them today. In any case, no mention is made of the father. If a single-parent family is the result of sin, for example with a ‘dum’ (deliberately unmarried mother) woman, or divorce, this irrevocably affects the relationship between parent and child if repentance and conversion do not take place.

It is the same in the house of Micah. The relationship between mother and son is not really sound. The son has no respect for his mother and her property, he steals eleven hundred pieces of silver from her. That is a fortune, given what we read in verse 10, where Micah offers the Levite a yearly salary of ten pieces of silver. However, he gives her this money back. He does not do this because his conscience has come to speak and he has gotten remorse and repentance from his deed. The only reason is his fear of the curse his mother has spoken about the thief. Superstition always becomes stronger when the fear of God is weak.

If he gives the money back, mother does not make any accusations. On the contrary, she blesses her stealing son who does not repent at all. She blesses, not because the son repents, but because she has her money back. "From the same mouth come [both] blessing and cursing. ..., these things ought not to be this way" (Jam 3:10-11). She even cites the name of the LORD in her blessing. That gives the whole the impression that God is happy with all this. It is a typical example of the vain use of the name of the LORD.

In this one verse we see several deviations from God. With such relationships in the families, things go from bad to worse for the people as a whole. There is no other way. If such things are found in the families, each of which is only for its own benefit, it means the downfall of the whole people.

Verses 3-4 | A Graven Image and a Molten Image

3 He then returned the eleven hundred [pieces] of silver to his mother, and his mother said, "I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you." 4 So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred [pieces] of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah.

The mother is so happy that she has the money back, that she immediately gives the whole amount to the LORD. She wants to have images made of it. By this she connects idol service with the service of the LORD. She does not seem to have the slightest problem with this. What this expresses is that she makes herself a religion according to her own thoughts. She also involves her son who totally participates in it. There is no thought of what God has said: "You shall not make for yourself an idol" (Exo 20:4). Their conscience does not seem to speak in any way.

Conscience is also not a measure of whether you are in the way of God or not. Perhaps her conscience would even have sued her if she had not made an image. A conscience can only work well if it is formed by the Word of God. For example, there are many within the roman-catholic church who visit mass and confess because otherwise their conscience will bother

them. It is imprinted in them that only in this way you are accepted by God. Satan has managed in many cases to get the conscience of religious man on his side.

There is talk of a graven image and a molten image. Both represent something. A graven image is the product of the activity of the human mind. What he knows about God, he works out in his own way without taking into account any revelation from God. It is to fill in the serving of God according to one's own idea, in a way that makes one feel good personally.

A molten image can be easily multiplied. It is religion cast in a certain form and introduced everywhere. They are the fixed forms in our prayers and worship. They are opposite to what is living and appropriate in the light of the revelation God has given of Himself in His Word.

It is dead orthodoxy, the religion that consists only of forms, where everyone is expected to comply with it and which can easily be complied with. They can be written down and anyone can adhere to them. Those who comply with these commandments can reassure their conscience and believe that God is also satisfied with it. One can check oneself and one another and measure the state of one's religion.

In both cases it is a religion that does not cost anyone everything. The mother does not give everything. Although she has set everything apart for the LORD – that is the meaning of the word “dedicate” – she gives only a part of it. This is always the hallmark of idolatry, something that is a production of its own: it does not cost everything. The man who goes to mass obediently, or to the meetings of the believers, or fulfills other religious obligations – regardless of whether they have been imposed on him, or whether he has imposed them on himself – may, in such a system, do for the rest of the day what he wants.

Verse 5 | Micah's Shrine

5 And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest.

With the making of an idol, which is a representation of God according to one's own imagination without taking into account what God says about Himself in the Bible, belongs also a certain form of worship. This is ex-

pressed in the ephod that Micah makes. An ephod is in fact a garment of the priest. Together with the ephod he makes household idols to have them as a kind of house gods. It doesn't matter what replaces God, as long as He is replaced. He also consecrates one of his sons as a priest.

In all Micah's actions there is an appearance of his self-willed worship of his self-made gods. It is one great mixture of the true religion with the false religion, making the whole a corrupt religion. The consecration of his son as a priest shows how far he has deviated from the precepts of God, which say that only sons of Aaron's family can be priests.

Just like Micah, the roman-catholic church has also consecrated her own 'sons' as priests, without any question about life from God. In the church of God only believers are priests and all believers together form a holy priesthood (1Pet 2:5). This they are because God says it in His Word. There is no human consecration involved.

Verse 6 | Do What Is Right in His Own Eyes

6 In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

If the people forget that God is their King, there is a lack of sound authority. In addition, there is a wrong authority, that of conscience. The Word of God, to know what He thinks of it, is not asked. Everyone does what he thinks is right.

A king, someone with superior authority, would have brought all to the same mind. They forgot God as such, they even rejected Him. When our hearts are turned toward the Lord Jesus, we are kept from doing what is good in our own eyes.

Verses 7-13 | The Levite From Bethlehem

7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there. 8 Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find [a place]; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. 9 Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may

find [a place].” 10 Micah then said to him, “Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten [pieces] of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance.” So the Levite went [in]. 11 The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. 12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah. 13 Then Micah said, “Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest.”

The generally prevailing spirit of anarchy also inspires a Levite from Bethlehem. His name is Jonathan. He is a grandson of Moses (Jdg 18:30). Bethlehem is not one of the forty-eight Levite cities. Yet the man is staying there. But driven by restlessness he moves on. Bethlehem, which means ‘bread house’, apparently does not give him what he expected from it.

He departs not to seek the place of the LORD, but a place for himself. A proverb from Proverbs 27 seems to apply to him: “Like a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man who wanders from his home” (Pro 27:8). He gives up his real, God-given dwelling place and security to become a vagabond. There is no trace of dependence on the LORD in his life.

The fact that the Levite also does ‘what is right in his eyes’ is mainly shown by the fact that he lets himself be consecrated to be a priest. The task of a Levite is to help the priest bringing sacrifices. A Levite is not allowed to be a priest and is not allowed to sacrifice.

But our Levite doesn’t mind. When he ends up at Micah’s on his journey and Micah offers him a contract for a job that seems great to him, with good working conditions, he doesn’t hesitate for a moment. Maybe he has thought that the LORD has made his way prosperous. All he has to do is to fulfill the religious duties of Micah.

Micah is then rid of that worry, while he is also happy that he now has a real Levite as a private priest. He believes that by this he has assured himself of the blessing of the LORD. Micah hires him, consecrates him and pays him. Thus the Levite becomes a clergy man.

By this, Micah gives his idolatry a very religious appearance and character. The Levite takes care of the religious affairs, so that Micah is free from them. He gives him a year’s salary, with which he hires the Levite for a

long time and therefore does not have to worry about spiritual matters for that time. A real Levite becomes a false priest.

In Protestantism, a Levite is also made a priest, someone who, in return for payment, performs religious acts for the benefit of others. The Levite becomes a mercenary and thus a clergy, the clericalism comes into being. The service of and for God is reduced here to something for which there is a commercial basis.

Without commenting on the sincere and noble motives with which one thinks one should hold an official clerical position, it is clear that the Bible does not speak of such a position. The Bible does not mention the performance of religious acts in return for payment, with the side effect that the payer can think that he is free from his own obligations toward God.

No man can take the place between God and His children. There is only "one God, [and] one mediator also between God and men, [the] man Christ Jesus" (1Tim 2:5). It is only through the Lord Jesus we are able to "draw near to God ..., since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

Judges 18

Introduction

What is found in the previous chapter with the Levite, we will see in this chapter with an entire tribe. The Levite searched in good luck for a place where he could go, without wondering what the LORD wants. Just like the other tribes, the tribe of Dan was given an inheritance, but did not take possession of it due to unfaithfulness. Now they are also in good luck looking for a place where they can settle. In this chapter they meet each other. The sin of the individual becomes the sin of an entire tribe.

Verses 1-2 | Seeking an Inheritance

1 In those days there was no king of Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel. 2 So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, "Go, search the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.

The tribe of Dan has proven to be the weakest tribe when conquering the land. We have seen this in Judges 1 (Jdg 1:34). They lacked the strength to take possession of the inheritance allotted to them. In the days when there is no king in Israel, they wander around looking for an inheritance. If there is no looking upward to God and no attentive ear for His directions, the result is disobedience and doing one's own will. This is indicative of the lack of strength.

In Joshua 19 God has given a clear description of the area He has reserved for the Danites (Jos 19:40-46). However, they avoid the enemy, whom they let live on their allotted inheritance and now go in search for an easier prey. The spies who are sent out come from the same area where Samson grew up (Jdg 13:25).

Sending spies is reminiscent of what Moses did (Num 13:2). This was done at the request of the people (Deu 1:22). It is not proof of simple trust in

what the LORD has said. Why should spies be sent out when God has made promises?

With the tribe of Dan everything happens from their own reasoning. Faith is nowhere to be discovered. But what about us? God has also given us our own inheritance. What do we do with that? If we do not take possession of it, we will focus on something else. Here the tribe of Dan is a picture of God's people seeking a place on earth because taking possession of the heavenly inheritance demands too much of them.

If we refuse God's choice for us, we search for ourselves, but then we are not in God's way. We finally arrive at the house and religion of Micah. The sequel shows that Micah's religion fits seamlessly with the Danites' mindset.

Verses 3-4 | Question and Answer

3 When they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; and they turned aside there and said to him, "Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this [place]? And what do you have here?" 4 He said to them, "Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me and I have become his priest."

When the Danites come to Micah's house, the Levite stands out by his way of talking. Apparently he doesn't belong here. To satisfy their curiosity, they ask him a few questions. These questions could have opened the Levite's eyes to the wrong he did and the false position he is in.

At question one, the honest answer should have been that his own will had brought him here. But that question is not answered. The other two questions are answered correctly. He exercises the priesthood for Micah, who gives him money for it and allows him to enjoy other benefits as well (Jdg 17:10). The Levite is a by men consecrated priest and must do what Micah expects of him.

We know this phenomenon today. In 2 Timothy 4 it says that there will be a time when people will be "[wanting] to have their ears tickled, ... accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires" (2Tim 4:3). In this time we live. For practicing their religion, people are looking for people who can speak nice and good, as long as their conscience is not addressed. They have to talk about the pleasant things of life. They may

quote the Bible, as long as they explain it in the way they like. What is said must not condemn them, because then they choose another preacher. The norms and values given by God in the Bible should not be too clear.

As a result, professing Christianity today shows no other image than the time we have before us in the book of Judges. The introduction of a clergy into Christianity began very early. It has been forgotten that it is not men who can appoint someone to a particular service, but that the Lord Jesus Himself has given gifts to His 'body', that is the church. We read "and He gave some [as] ..." (Eph 4:11), and "but now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired" (1Cor 12:18). This does not involve negotiations on employment conditions, as is currently the case with the clergy.

The gifts are for the whole church, not for a separate group. No group can claim a gift for itself. By the willful actions of man this is denied and pushed aside. Each group has its own prominent leaders. Also in this respect there is nothing new under the sun. This evil is already found in the church in Corinth. The apostle Paul addresses this matter in his first letter to them directly in the first chapter (1Cor 1:10-13).

Verses 5-6 | Again Question and Answer

5 They said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous." 6 The priest said to them, "Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the LORD's approval."

Apparently convinced by the answers the Levite gave to their questions, the Danites see in him someone through whom they can ask the will of God. God is involved, but only to serve as a kind of seal of approval on their actions. They ask the way of someone who has departed from God himself. By asking such a man about the will of God, the Danites betray their own spiritual condition. They do not wonder whether the position of the Levite has any right of existence before God. He presents himself as a clergy man, holds this position with Micah and so he is acceptable to the Danites.

They get the answer they want to hear. They flatter him by acknowledging him in his position. He flatters them by giving them the answer they like to hear. He doesn't have to think about this answer for a second. There is no

indication whatsoever that he is really involving God. He tells them that they can go in peace, indicating that they will triumph over their enemies.

Verse 7 | A Prosperous Journey

7 Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating [them] for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.

What the Levite predicted comes true. They arrive in an area that meets all their desires of laziness and selfishness. The people who live there, live withdrawn, do not care about anything and have nothing to do with anyone. It is a people who live lawless: “There was no ruler.” They are not accountable to anyone.

Lawlessness does not necessarily mean all kinds of atrocities. Lawlessness is to live without regard to the authority that is set above us. For every human being this is in any case the authority of God. We can say that in 1 John 3 we have the definition of sin: “Sin is lawlessness” (1Jn 3:4b).

The people discovered by the Danites are not people of what we would call great sinners. They live neatly and peacefully. Yet they are not less sinners because of that. This is also shown by the fact that they live “after the manner of the Sidonians”. What the Sidonians propose, we saw during the discussion of Judges 3 (Jdg 3:3). There we saw that the Sidonians are people characterized by greed. They have an insatiable hunger for money. In the same way the people live whom the Danites find in that place.

We can compare them to people who work hard and live soberly, but only do so to hoard. They count, so to speak, their money every day and conclude with pleasure that again it is slightly more than the previous day. The possession of money is their everything. Giving something away is the worst thought that might come to mind. They live for themselves and do not want to have anything to do with anyone; this would only cause problems because it could cost money. The Danites want to take over this place and position. The area is attractive to them. The discovery of this area seems to be an affirmative answer to their question to God through the Levite.

This is a lesson for us that an answer we receive, which is to our liking, does not always mean that we are in the Lord's way. It is important in what mind we have prayed. Sometimes God allows us to get what we ask for because He sees that we are determined in our own will. Such a thing always causes great damage: "So He gave them their request, but sent a wasting disease among them" (Psa 106:15).

Asking for the will of God presupposes sincerity toward Him and the awareness that He really knows what is best. Paul encourages us: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6). Then he does not say that we will also receive what we have asked for, but: "The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:7). By bringing everything to the Lord and entrusting ourselves to Him, we keep peace and rest in our heart. Suffering spiritual poverty is not an issue then.

Verses 8-10 | The Report of the Spies

8 When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What [do] you [report]?" 9 They said, "Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land. 10 When you enter, you will come to a secure people with a spacious land; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth."

The tribe mates are very curious about the findings of the spies. They report enthusiastically and insist on immediate action. What they have seen exceeds the wildest expectations. In their passionate story there is even space for God. Here too God is 'called in' to put the seal of approval on their report.

Nobody wonders if this is the land God has thought good for them. After all, all the circumstances already make it clear that God has given this land into their hands, don't they? With the same eyes and mindset, Lot used to look at the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. It looked "like the garden of the LORD" (Gen 13:10), a doozy place to dwell. Lot did not wonder what the LORD wanted. He followed with his heart what his eyes saw. We read

in Genesis 19 about the misfortune this brought to him and his family (Gen 19:1-38). The Danites have exactly the same spirit as Lot had.

Verses 11-21 | The Promotion of Micah's Priest

11 Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out. 12 They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. 13 They passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah. 14 Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish said to their kinsmen, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do." 15 They turned aside there and came to the house of the young man, the Levite, to the house of Micah, and asked him of his welfare. 16 The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the sons of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. 17 Now the five men who went to spy out the land went up [and] entered there, [and] took the graven image and the ephod and household idols and the molten image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men armed with weapons of war. 18 When these went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" 19 They said to him, "Be silent, put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" 20 The priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image and went among the people. 21 Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the livestock and the valuables in front of them.

The call of the spies is answered. An army of six hundred men sets out to take possession of 'the promised land'. Via Kiriath-jearim they reach the house of Micah. Then follows a remarkably detailed and vivid description of the way in which the Levite of Micah is taken over by the tribe of Dan.

The five men of the first mission lead the six hundred. Five is the number of responsibility. Just as they are responsible for recommending the tribe's new home area, so they are also responsible for the way this expedition is carried out. They take the floor and the initiative. Obviously, before taking

possession of the area in question, they had planned to recruit the Levite as a tribal priest. After all, he made them hear a very favorable statement from God, which has come true. They can use such a man in their tribe very well.

They also tell their contemporaries of the other discovery they made, of the idols in the houses of Micah. They don't have to explain what they mean. Their tribesmen have the same spiritual mindset as they have.

When they arrive at the house, the five men first enter the house, while the others wait at the gate. The five take away the idols. If the priest sees this, he objects. However, that does not impress in any way. A self-willed priesthood is nothing. It serves only to satisfy religious feelings. The tribe of Dan is looking for this. Therefore, the Levite is silenced without pardon and they make him an enticing proposal.

The priest's mood changes immediately when he hears what is promised. This proposal means an important improvement in his position and a larger circle within which he can exert his influence. The whole thing is so attractive, that he doesn't even think about his obligations toward Micah anymore. He packs his things and goes with the Danites. The thought of asking about God's will does not arise in him at all.

This kind of thing is not strange to us. Although we may not be asked, we are all sensitive to spiritual promotion. Imagine that we can choose from two occasions where we can tell something about the Lord Jesus. On one occasion we can expect a few hundred people, while on the other we can be happy when twenty people come up. What opportunity would we prefer? Isn't it to that place where we can tell hundreds of people something about the Lord Jesus? It is to be desired that we first speak with the Lord about it. Then He will make it clear where we have to go.

The point is, that we are naturally inclined to look at what we see with our eyes, isn't it? Let us be honest. What the Levite does is in our blood. The only thing that can keep us from such human and carnal motives is a sincere questioning of the will of God. Let us not lose sight of the danger of the financial aspect either. The temptation to be guided by this is at least as great as the size of the audience. Places where a spiritual service is

rewarded well are more popular than those where they don't rattle with the moneybag.

Anyone who may do a service for the Lord must take such dangers into account. We can learn this from the negotiations between the Danites and the Levite. The only commissioner must be the Lord. Our only motive must be to serve Him. Everything else we can leave to Him.

Verses 22-26 | Micah's Protest

22 When they had gone some distance from the house of Micah, the men who [were] in the houses near Micah's house assembled and overtook the sons of Dan. 23 They cried to the sons of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, "What is [the matter] with you, that you have assembled together?" 24 He said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what do I have besides? So how can you say to me, 'What is [the matter] with you?'" 25 The sons of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, or else fierce men will fall upon you and you will lose your life, with the lives of your household." 26 So the sons of Dan went on their way; and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

Then Micah discovers that his house gods and his priest are lost, consequently, he drums up his men and starts the chase. After they have overtaken the Danites, the deeply sad testimony of Micah follows. Now that his idol and his priest are gone, he has nothing left. He feels he has been robbed of all spiritual support. Because a simple calculation teaches him that he with his small army can never take on the Danites, he goes home like a beaten dog. Apparently it does not occur to him to ask for the true God. That great is the spiritual decay in the people of Israel.

The Danites, however, are not better. Without a trace of pity they snarl poor Micah, despite the fact that he is a fellow countryman of them. When the true God no longer has His unifying place among His people, it is done with the unity of that people. There is therefore no respect for each other anymore. The following chapters will prove this abundantly.

Micah is not a man of faith. He relies on external things. The grip of his life is anchored in what is tangible. If that is taken away from him, he is

adrift. How many Christians have not unconsciously relied on the certainties with which they have surrounded themselves? For us, an idol is something that separates us from God, something that makes us independent of Him in our actions. Those who rely only on their driving abilities in traffic and not on the preservation of God, have made these abilities an idol. This is what he admires, without including God Who gave him those capacities. Those who rely solely on their insurance policies in case of setbacks and keep God out of those setbacks, have given their insurance the status of idolatry.

A man of faith may well possess certain external things, but his faith does not rely on them. It is the state of his heart toward God that is decisive, and in that mind he also looks at all kinds of external things. This is missing with Micah.

What Micah does and says here reminds us of what his ancestor Abraham once did, but in all respects in the greatest possible contrast with Micah. Abraham also chases with a small army of three hundred and eighteen men a large army (Gen 14:10-16). He does not do this to bring back idols, but to free his deviated brother Lot. He does not negotiate, but defeats the united armies of no less than five kings and frees his brother and nephew Lot.

It is not for nothing that Abraham is called “the father of the believers”. In him we see a shining example of how faith in God works. From him we can learn how to do it and from Micah how not to do it.

Verses 27-31 | The Conquest of Laish

27 Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire. 28 And there was no one to deliver [them], because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it. 29 They called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish. 30 The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. 31 So they set

up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

The idols and the priest of Micah are taken away by the Danites as a kind of mascot. It will certainly ensure success in the assignment for which they are on the road. And so it happens. Laish offers no opposition. Because of their secluded position, there is no one around to catch a possible emergency signal and come to their aid.

God uses the tribe of Dan to judge them for their selfish, money-minded lifestyle. The fact that the tribe of Dan itself can be condemned does not prevent God from using them to punish others. Several histories in this book are proof of this. All the nations used by God to judge His people for their unfaithfulness are nations that must be judged themselves. That has happened, or will happen.

The city built instead of Laish, is called Dan. This city of Dan becomes the proverbial north of Israel, which encompassed everything between "Dan and Berseba" (Jdg 20:1; 1Sam 3:20; 2Sam 3:10).

The Levite Jonathan must be a grandson of Moses (Exo 2:22). It is assumed that here in verse 30 it should be read for Manasseh Moses. There is only one letter difference in Hebrew between the words Manasseh and Moses. It is shocking to see that someone from his descendants, and already so soon, officially gives idolatry within a tribe of Israel right of existence. This is yet another proof that godliness and grace are not inheritances. Both the history of Israel and that of professing Christianity provide blatant examples of this. We also see it in families of faithful believers.

The history of Micah, the Levite and the tribe of Dan ends with the mention of the two religious systems that exist side by side: the man-made religion and the place where God in that time has His house, Shiloh. In the eyes of men, the two may go together, but in the eyes of God this is impossible.

The service in Shiloh will end. This happens when Hophni and Phinehas, two ungodly priests, take the ark as a mascot and it is captured by the Philistines (1Sam 4:10-11). But as long as the tabernacle is still there, it is possible for people like the God-fearing Hannah to meet the LORD in Shiloh (1Sam 1:9-11).

Judges 19

Introduction

As already mentioned, also Judges 19-21 form a whole. They deal with a particular event and its results, and expose the moral condition of the people.

God never disguises the condition of His own, neither in the individual nor in the people as a whole. Painfully detailed is described an event that is unparalleled among the people of God. It can be shocking to read such a story, but it must be done. God has not included this in His Word for nothing. Each of us must become aware that these are actions that each of us can commit. He who thinks he is not capable of such a thing, knows himself badly. It is also good and beneficial to know that God also knows the worst of us.

The Lord Jesus also wanted to bear that for all His own. He knows like no other the hidden depths of the human heart and what can arise when the opportunity arises, or the circumstances are appropriate. He knows what it means to be in God's presence with this. That is why in Gethsemane His sweat has become like large drops of blood. There He felt the suffering on the cross, where He was made sin and God's wrath struck Him because of sin.

If the connection with God is abandoned – we have seen this in Judges 17-18 – the unity of the people is also broken, and there is no longer any question of building up together in love and peace. After breaking the first tablet of the law, which regulates the connection between the people and God, the second tablet, which regulates the connections between the people, is now broken. The break with God also causes any other connection to be broken.

We can make the following subdivision:

1. Judges 19 describes sin;
2. Judges 20 describes the treatment of it, how the people deal with it;
3. Judges 21 describes the result of that treatment.

Verse 1 | No Longer Authority in Israel

1 Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah.

The first verse tells us directly in what time the events that take place before our eyes happen. It shows how it is possible that this atrocity, with all its miserable aftermath, which God's Spirit describes in such detail, can take place. There is no recognized authority to which one has to submit. Everyone is his own law. This creates a fertile ground for the most horrible excesses of the evil heart of man who has turned his back on God. If it is also someone who has an outward connection with God, but does not take the authority of God into account in his life, someone who has even pushed Him aside, then the deepest fall is near.

If there is any recognition of God in the Levite from the previous chapters, there is nothing left of God in the Levite about whom we read here. God does not seem to exist for him. Here the saying is confirmed that the corruption of the best is the worst corruption. We are dealing with matters among the people of God, which even in the world are condemned (cf. 1Cor 5:1).

Verse 2 | The Unfaithfulness of the Concubine

2 But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months.

If in the course of history we see how the Levite deals with his concubine, she will not have felt very comfortable with him. There is nothing to discover of any affection. This is also evident from the fact that it is only after four full months that he comes to look for her. This does not acquit the woman. She also does what she wants. The fact that she is not happy with her husband is not a license for her to sleep with another man. The woman's behavior also depicts what the Levite himself is, namely unfaithful in his relationship with God.

Verses 3-10 | The Reunification and the Departure

3 Then her husband arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So she

brought him into her father's house, and when the girl's father saw him, he was glad to meet him. 4 His father-in-law, the girl's father, detained him; and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there. 5 Now on the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; and the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Sustain yourself with a piece of bread, and afterward you may go." 6 So both of them sat down and ate and drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, "Please be willing to spend the night, and let your heart be merry." 7 Then the man arose to go, but his father-in-law urged him so that he spent the night there again. 8 On the fifth day he arose to go early in the morning, and the girl's father said, "Please sustain yourself, and wait until afternoon"; so both of them ate. 9 When the man arose to go along with his concubine and servant, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold now, the day has drawn to a close; please spend the night. Lo, the day is coming to an end; spend the night here that your heart may be merry. Then tomorrow you may arise early for your journey so that you may go home." 10 But the man was not willing to spend the night, so he arose and departed and came to [a place] opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). And there were with him a pair of saddled donkeys; his concubine also was with him.

It takes four months before the man decides to look for his wife. He wants to bring her back. It is possible that he only wants to bring her back because of the defamation he experiences when people ask where she is. He always has to tell that his wife has run away. He will try to persuade his wife to go with him by working on her mind or, as it says here, "to speak tenderly to her".

Nothing shows that he wants to try to convince his wife of her unfaithfulness and the necessity to confess her sin. Nor does the whole story show anywhere that his wife agrees to go with him. Nowhere do we read that she says anything. Her act of harlotry and her gruesome end bear witness to how her life has been. She has no place in the conversation of the man with her father. We can conclude this from verse 6 and verse 8 where there is talk of "both of them", which in both cases means the man and the father.

In this conversation the man makes himself known as a bon vivant who is looking for carnal convenience. He is easy to persuade. He is a man without a backbone, whose life is filled with food and drink (verse 4) and being merry (verse 6). He stays for three days. When he wants to leave at

the start of the fourth day, his father-in-law manages to stall him with food and drinks so that he stays all day long. He even persuades him to spend the night with him and be merry. This 'being merry' again is because of food and drink. His cheerful life continues day and night. Life becomes one big party.

The father-in-law manages to stall the Levite for a fifth day with food and drinks. So five days have passed. It is only on the evening of the fifth day that he sets off. This time he is no longer persuaded. But the time of his departure does not exactly guarantee a prosperous journey. The delay that he has had will be disastrous for him.

As a general lesson we can learn from this that it is good to know not only that we have to go somewhere, but also that we know when we have to go. With the Levite, there is only an action according to the situation of the moment and according to the hunch of his own heart. After all, it is the time that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes", isn't it? These people are characterized by the fact that "there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom 3:18). The Levite thinks that now is the time to go, so he goes, without wondering if the time is right.

Verses 11-14 | Where to Spend the Night: In Jebus or Gibeah

11 When they [were] near Jebus, the day was almost gone; and the servant said to his master, "Please come, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it." 12 However, his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah." 13 He said to his servant, "Come and let us approach one of these places; and we will spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah." 14 So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin.

After a short trip, it is time to find a place to spend the night. After all, the day was almost gone when they left. Jebus comes in sight. The servant suggests to go there. But that's not what the Levite wants. What is his objection against Jebus? He calls it a "city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel". This is what is called an example of Pharisaism. Pharisees are people to whom the Lord Jesus says: "Hypocrites! For you clean the

outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence” (Mt 23:25). Apparently the Levite doesn’t want to have a connection with wrong from the outside, but he himself is full of impurity inside.

This contains the warning that we must be careful that there is no balance between our personal sanctification and our public action, in other words, between doctrine and life. There should be no difference between them. What people see of us should be the result of our inner fellowship with God and what He has made clear to us through His Word. If our actions for people are meticulous, while our personal, inner sanctification for God is not so meticulous, there is no awareness of what sin really is. The remainder of this chapter clearly shows this. The Levite does not take God into account, only what people might say. He acts as if Israel were still living close to God, while the people have already deviated far from God.

In the light of the spiritual state in Israel, what is written in verse 14 – “and the sun set on them near Gibeah” – is more than the description of a natural phenomenon. The sun literally sets, that’s right, it’s going to be night, but it’s also the referral to the decay in Israel and especially here in Gibeah. It is a place where it will soon become clear in a terrible way how great the spiritual darkness in the hearts of the inhabitants is.

It is obvious that the Levite does not know what kind of immoral place he enters. This also shows that he has no interest whatsoever in the honor of God among His people. Surely a Levite is someone appointed by God to teach His law to the people, isn’t he? So Moses said it in his blessing of Levi (Deu 33:10a). Apparently this Levite doesn’t care about that. What does the state of God’s people care to him? He thinks only of his own interest and not that of God and His people (cf. Phil 2:4).

Verses 15-21 | Lodging in Gibeah

15 They turned aside there in order to enter [and] lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into [his] house to spend the night. 16 Then behold, an old man was coming out of the field from his work at evening. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was staying in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Ben-

jamites. 17 And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?" 18 He said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, [for] I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem in Judah. But I am [now] going to my house, and no man will take me into his house. 19 Yet there is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, your maidservant, and the young man who is with your servants; there is no lack of anything." 20 The old man said, "Peace to you. Only let me take care of all your needs; however, do not spend the night in the open square." 21 So he took him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank.

The choice is made, Gibeah will be the place where they will spend the night. Arriving there, a very cool reception awaits them. The first acquaintance with this city must have been cold, after the abundant hospitality in his father-in-law's house. This shows the low moral level of the inhabitants of Gibeah. The usual hospitality is not respected. Where one is focused on the satisfaction of one's own needs, one loses sight of the care for the members of God's people and one doesn't get around to grant hospitality. This was the case then, it is still the case now.

Fortunately, they are noticed by an old man who comes from work and is on his way home. The old man lives there as a stranger, just like Lot in Sodom at the time. He first asks some questions. The Danites did the same (Jdg 18:3). We noted that the Levite's eyes would have been opened to the things he was doing, if he had thought carefully about those questions. We can also apply this here. He tells that he wants to go from "Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim" to arrive at "the house of the LORD" (as it also can be translated).

The environment to which he wants to go is that which he has left in verse 1. He adds that he is on his way to the house of the LORD, which in his days is in Bethel or in Shiloh. It is not clear whether he wants to stay there or just pay a visit. In any case, when mentioning those places his conscience does not speak. It does not remind him of his own unfaithfulness to God and of what happened to his wife. A person who is far removed from God with his conscience no longer sees the hand of God. If he indicates that he is on his way to the house of the LORD, it may well have to do with satisfying

a religious need that arises from his feelings and not from a desire to meet the LORD.

He complains about the lack of hospitality. He only needs lodging. He doesn't need anything else, because as far as the rest is concerned, he is provided with everything. Yet his need will turn out to be greater than he thinks. Because the old man knows how things are in the city, he doesn't let the visitors spend the night on the square, but gives them shelter for the night.

It seems that the Levite has found a good place for the night, where he can give in to his desires for food and drink. But it soon becomes clear that this hospitality does not mean protection against the immoral practices of the citizens of the city.

Verses 22-26 | The Scandal at Gibeah

22 While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him." 23 Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly. 24 Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man." 25 But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and brought [her] out to them; and they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn. 26 As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man's house where her master was, until [full] daylight.

While the Levite is feasting on eating and drinking, as if life only consists of that, he is confronted with the harsh reality of the "sensual conduct of unprincipled men" (2Pet 2:7), as Lot came into contact with them in earlier times when he lived in Sodom (Gen 19:4-5). However, there is a big difference. What used to take place in the heathen Sodom now takes place in Israel, among the people of God, by people who bear God's Name. No an-

gels come here to intervene, as they did in Genesis 19 (Gen 19:10-11). Later God will say of His people: "All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah" (Jer 23:14).

In the New Testament we come across such an equation when we place the section of Romans 1:29-32 next to the section of 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (Rom 1:29-32; 2Tim 3:1-5). We then discover that of the sins mentioned in Romans 1, relating to the Gentiles, many can be found in 2 Timothy 3. From 2 Timothy 3 we now know that it is about people who call themselves Christians. Israel has descended here to the level of Sodom and Gomorrah. Professing Christianity has descended to the level of the world. Isn't that sad for God?

The sin committed in Gibeah is that of homosexual behavior. The men of Gibeah want to have sexual intercourse with the man who has just entered their city. These people give themselves over to a practice that is clearly forbidden in the Scriptures (Lev 18:22; 20:13). In Romans 1, this sin is mentioned as a judgment God brings on one who deviates from Him and honors and serves the creature above the Creator (Rom 1:25-27).

The Bible condemns the practice, not the person. However, if the person does not want to listen to what the Bible says, the person is identified with the sin and receives the punishment for sin. This applies to every sin that a person commits. God still has the door to forgiveness wide open. His condition is that sin is confessed wholeheartedly: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jn 1:9).

A single word about homosexual feelings is appropriate here. Sometimes it happens that someone experiences a stronger attraction to people of the same sex than to people of the opposite sex. Whoever has a problem with this and, because he or she is a Christian, does not want to give in to it, needs the support of fellow Christians. The appeal to us as fellow Christians is to support such a person wholeheartedly and to support him/her in the struggle.

The reaction to the attitude of the men of Gibeah is as shocking as what those men want. The old man makes the improbable proposal to use his own daughter and his guest's concubine to satisfy their perverse lusts. It may well be true that, in an oriental way, a host wants to fully guarantee

the safety of his guest. Yet it is incomprehensible that he does this offer. According to his feelings it will be so that he gives permission and opportunity to commit a “small” sin to prevent a larger one. Lot has done the same with offering his daughters (Gen 19:8). In any case, it remains a disgusting and repulsive affair.

In this way every believer can act who has lost his connection with God, but still wants to uphold a certain ‘honor’ in a certain area. By living in a godless environment there is the danger of the numbing of feelings. Paul warns the believers in Ephesus – and also us – about this. Let’s never think we wouldn’t be able to do anything like that. God knows us better than we know ourselves.

Realistically and powerfully Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, says: “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Eph 4:17-19).

How can I prevent myself from “not run with [them] into the same excesses of dissipation” (1Pet 4:4)? The following verses of Ephesians 4 give the answer. It is to look at Christ and to accept in faith that it is also said to me: “But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ... and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self [literally: man], which in [the likeness of] God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:20-24). That is the wonderful assurance needed to live to the glory of God, amidst so much excess and immorality around me.

With the old man and the Levite there is no question of calling to God for salvation. The cold-blooded sacrifice by the Levite of his concubine shows why the woman ran away from him. He has no affection for her. He possesses her for himself. Now he can use her to save his skin.

In sober terms, on which we must not let our imaginations run wild, the Bible writer tells us that “they raped her and abused her all night until

morning". It is indeed the works of darkness, of which we read: "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret" (Eph 5:11-12). This is man who acts according to the lusts of his own heart, which is always at the expense of the other.

The woman does not survive this more than beastly treatment. Because she can't go anywhere else, she goes to the house "where her master was". He is her 'master', which typifies the relationship. She apparently has the same relationship with him as the servant (verse 11). She is therefore nothing more than a tool, something he can dispose of according to his will. When she arrives at the house, her strength is exhausted and she dies.

Verses 27-29 | The Reaction of the Levite

27 When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold. 28 He said to her, "Get up and let us go," but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home. 29 When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.

The woman died of the sin in which she used to live, and which she had given up without repentance. God lets the measure of sin become full. At the dawn of the day, the effects of evil become visible to both woman and man. Here we see how completely indifferent the man is, how callous, how totally insensitive. You can't imagine that he just slept. Yet it seems that he went to bed and slept well. When he gets up the next day and wants to leave a little later, he sees his wife lying down. Without any feeling of compassion, without any question about her condition, he orders her to get up.

Her hands on the threshold may speak of the appeal for protection that she has made and that every house in Israel should have given her. She must have suffered terribly, both physically and mentally, from the evil of the men of Gibeah. She must have suffered terribly, especially spiritually, because there was no one to protect her. She must have suffered horribly

when, after such a horrible treatment, she could not find a hearing in the house where her husband was.

When the man sees what has happened, he loads his wife on his donkey and goes home. Coming home he cuts her into twelve pieces and sends a piece of her body to each tribe of Israel. The man acts in the cold awareness that what happened to his wife affects the whole people. Although the act took place in one particular city, the stain of what happened rests on the whole people. Everyone should know what happened. The sin of a few is the sin of the whole.

Verse 30 | The Reaction in Israel

30 All who saw [it] said, "Nothing like this has [ever] happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!"

The shock is intense, the indignation great. Never has the condition of Israel been such that such a sin could take place. It is also an unparalleled sin in Israel's existence as a nation. Centuries later, the prophet Hosea reminds of this history to make clear to the people how deep they, again, have sunk: "They have gone deep in depravity as in the days of Gibeah. ... From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel" (Hos 9:9a; 10:9a).

The people are in turmoil. What needs to be done? They call for consultation and deliberation and the making of a decision. What has happened hurts their national pride. What should the neighboring nations think of it when they hear this?

We read nothing about the reproach that has been done to God with this and the shame before God that this has happened among them, His people. If they had really cared about the honor of God, they would have expressed their indignation earlier, in the previous chapters. But the idolatry of Micah and the tribe of Dan have left them cold. The dishonor inflicted on God in this way does not matter to them, nor has it caused them any turmoil. Now, however, their 'good' name is being daubed, now they have to act.

Judges 20

Introduction

This chapter highlights important issues that also apply to the exercise of discipline in the church. In addition, it emerges that this exercise of discipline is something the whole church has to deal with. The whole people are involved. The way that Israel goes to remove sin from among themselves and what God teaches them on that way, give a clear illustration of the actions of local churches when sin has to be removed from among them. It also shows the mind in which this should be done,

Any sin that becomes public in a local church and must be disciplined is at the same time a matter for the church to reflect on its cause. She will have to examine her own condition in God's light and have the desire to hear from Him how it is possible that this sin could have happened.

Verses 1-2 | The People of God as One Man

1 Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah. 2 The chiefs of all the people, [even] of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword.

The first thing that the message of the atrocity works out is that the whole people come together as one man to the LORD. Although there is still a lot to be learned later on, this fact in itself is a praiseworthy reaction. It is the time when everyone does what is right in his eyes. Characteristic of such a time is that people live apart from each other. Every feeling of togetherness has disappeared. In a time of individualism the LORD uses the sin committed to bring unity among His people again.

The second thing is that they are in the right position and that is with the LORD at Mizpa. A correct position, however, is no guarantee for a correct mind. Some important conditions may be met, such as unanimity and a correct position, but there is something else that needs to be added and that is the right mind.

It is a good thing that the people come together as one man – see also verse 8 and verse 11 – to punish evil. It is also good that they are diligent in cleansing themselves from evil, just as it is good that they are in the right position. But the people are not yet in the good mind to exercise discipline. They only act out of carnal indignation and on their own initiative. Only in verse 18 do they ask God, but then they have already made their own plans. It is evil that brings them together.

But never will anything that is evil be able to serve as a bond with which God's people can be held together. And if taking the right position does not lead to an appropriate attitude and behavior, this is no guarantee for correct handling in disciplinary cases. These things must go hand in hand.

It may be that believers take the right place or position in professing Christianity. I am thinking here of the church meeting around the Lord Jesus, with Him as her center, free from all kinds of human institutions or group thinking. If this is not done out of love for Christ and with a sense of grace and in an attitude of humility, the confession of that position gives no guarantee of blessing and the presence of the Lord Jesus.

When there is unity, the leaders also come forward. An important aspect in the functioning of the church as a unity is that there is again the exercising of leadership in a biblical way. In Judges 5 we have heard Deborah singing about leaders who took the lead again (Jdg 5:2). If there is no king in Israel and there is no leadership, this is also at the expense of the feeling of togetherness.

Verses 3-7 | The Report of the Levite

3 (Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the sons of Israel said, "Tell [us], how did this wickedness take place?" 4 So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. 5 But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died. 6 And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance; for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel. 7 Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here."

When asked, the Levite gives a brief account of the events at Gibeah. He lets nothing be heard of his own unfaithfulness and the wrong way he has gone. He also conceals the fact that he himself has given his concubine into the hands of those lusty people. He also makes it appear as if he has been in danger of death. He tells his story in such a way that he himself emerges from it as well as possible.

He motivates the cutting in pieces of his concubine's body and its distribution in Israel by pointing out the scandalous act and the folly committed in Israel. He concludes by pointing out that, as Israelites, they should know what they have to do. He does not say a word about his own responsibility as Levite who must teach the law.

Verses 8-10 | The Reaction

8 Then all the people arose as one man, saying, "Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house. 9 But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; [we will go up] against it by lot. 10 And we will take ten men out of hundred throughout the tribes of Israel, and hundred out of thousand, and thousand out of ten thousand to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish [them] for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel."

With his story, the man has underlined once again the fact that the people are already convinced of the action that must be taken against the men who committed this atrocity. They commit themselves not to go home before they have dealt with Gibeah. All they have to do is to find out by lot in what order they should go to battle. Ten percent of the men are kept apart to provide food during the campaign. Everything that is being done is still about the dishonor done to Israel and not about the dishonor done to God.

Verses 11-14 | The Demand to Gibeah and the Response to It

11 Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man. 12 Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you? 13 Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove [this] wickedness from Israel." But the sons of Benjamin

would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel. 14 The sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel.

For the third time we read that Israel is gathered “as one man” – see verse 1 and verse 8. The message they have sent through the entire tribe of Benjamin, in which Gibeah lies, is short and concise. Its text indicates that they are not yet in the right mind to act against evil. In the previous verses we have seen that the willingness to act stems from human indignation. Because of this they don’t think of first asking the LORD to know how to act against sin. They speak to Benjamin about the evil that has happened “among you” and not ‘among us’.

Perhaps we have also noticed that we see sin sooner in the other person than in ourselves. To be able to point out sin to someone else, there must first be self-judgment. This means that one must be free of sin oneself, that there must be no unjudged sin in one’s own life. If anyone thinks he should be concerned with the sins of others, while allowing his own sins to exist, he is hypocritical. The words of the Lord Jesus apply to such a person when He says: “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Mt 7:5).

Being personally free from sins is a first condition to be met by self-judgment. A second condition is linked to this self-judgment. We can only point out his sin to someone if we realize that what he has done wrong can also happen to us, including me. We are nothing better than the other. Galatians 6 tells us how we can meet this second condition: “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; [each one] looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted” (Gal 6:1).

What Israel must learn is to identify with the sin that has been committed and that it is not just the sin of a city or a tribe. With the sin through Achan this same principle comes to the fore: “But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, ... took some of the things under the ban” (Jos 7:1). There is one man who sins, but the whole people are declared guilty by God.

If Israel had identified itself with the sin of Gibeah, Benjamin would have reacted in another way. Benjamin would then have seen a people mourning and confessing sin as if they had committed it themselves. But there are no fraternal feelings among the people. It is easier to see things that are wrong and that need to be judged than to go to God with those things and see and feel them as God sees and feels them. Through their actions, they blame only the sons of Benjamin and hold them accountable for what happened, without realizing that it is an evil that took place in their midst, that is, in the midst of Israel.

In the New Testament Paul deals with a sin within the church that bad that it was not found even among the Gentiles (1Cor 5:1). What he blames the Corinthians above all for is that they have not mourned about the terrible evil that is taking place among them (1Cor 5:2). They continue to meet as if nothing is wrong. This is also a way of not identifying yourself one with the present evil.

Both in Corinth and here in Judges one reacts to evil in a self-willed way. The matter is not presented to God with shame about what has happened, so He cannot reveal His will as to how to act.

Israel is taking the wrong approach to the matter, but that doesn't acquit Benjamin's reaction to it. What the sons of Benjamin do shows that they are not aware of the horrible sin committed in their area. In this way the whole tribe identifies itself with sin. Sin is bad, but even worse is the refusal to condemn it. They even defend sin, even though they did not commit sin themselves, but a number of corrupt people.

What started as a punitive expedition against a city, degenerates into a complete civil war because of Benjamin's attitude. Having tolerated the evil in their midst, they are now going to defend it and start a brother war. Benjamin turns it into a tribal case. We hear nothing more about the culprits themselves.

As can be seen from 1 Corinthians 5, the worst sin can occur in every local community. However bad and shameful that may be, the presence of the worst sin cannot be a reason for anyone to leave a community of Christians. One reason to withdraw from a local church, however, is the refusal to condemn even the slightest evil. Then it is even necessary that we separate ourselves, if we do not want to be judged by God with the whole.

Verses 15-21 | First Encounter

15 From the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men. 16 Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. 17 Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war. 18 Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God and said, "Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?" Then the LORD said, "Judah shall go up first." 19 So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah. 20 The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah. 21 Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel.

The positions have been made clear on both sides. There is no longer any doubt, there is no hope of restoration. Numerically, the sons of Benjamin are far in the minority, but their capacities compensate for that to a large extent. There is talk of "700 choice men" who "were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss" (verse 16)

They can be exquisite men, known for their accuracy, their precision, but if they commit themselves to an evil cause, they use their abilities wrongly. We can compare them to people we also encounter in professing Christianity. People who are very precise in everything, but sometimes call evil good. Because of their precise approach to the matter it seems that they still have the right on their side as well.

Benjamin wins the victory again and again, but we see in a moment why. Not everything is as it should be with the tribes that go out to battle. Certainly, they ask God for advice, but they do so only after they have decided how they will act. The only thing they want to know is which tribe has to go out first. They have already asked this question once before, in Judges 1 (Jdg 1:1). But what a difference between Judges 1 and here. There they ask their question with a view to fighting the enemy, while here they want to fight a brother and already have arranged everything.

Thus there may be situations in which we too say that it is unnecessary to consult God. We see that there is sin and we are ready to act immediate-

ly, without it coming to us to go to God with that sin and first to identify ourselves with it. In our view, this is not necessary. There are still some details, such as who has to speak with the brother or sister who has fallen into sin. To do so, we first ask God, but that's it.

It takes more to be used by God to deal appropriately with evil than just a quick willingness to act as His instrument. Their revenge is too direct, too inappropriate, too ruthless. There is too little awareness that they must carry out God's judgment. They do not bring a sin offering, which, if they had brought it, would have been proof that they identified themselves with evil. Instead, they count on their supremacy.

The result is defeat. Through this defeat, God wants to teach them that numbers do not count for Him and that their confidence to win the victory because of it is wrong. The fact that the Israelites are defeated may be due to the fact that they themselves are not free from the influences of the pernicious practices of the Canaanites either. Then there can be no power to act. What they need is the same cleansing as Benjamin.

Verses 22-25 | The Second Encounter

22 But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day. 23 The sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him." 24 Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day. 25 Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword.

The defeat comes hard. They did not expect this. They are working on a just cause, aren't they? Their large number is proof of that, isn't it? So why are they defeated instead of the evildoers punished? Is God then on the side of the sinning tribe?

They may have asked themselves all these questions. Yet the first reaction to their defeat is not that they go to God with these questions. The first thing they do is to encourage themselves: "But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place

where they had arrayed themselves the first day.” David did it differently. We read of him after he has lost everything through his own fault and the people turn against him: “But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God” (1Sam 30:6).

The Israelites first encourage themselves and then they ask the LORD. They are still not in the right place before God, although they are much more cautious in their questions to Him. They still have to learn the lesson that they are nothing better in themselves than their brother. They have to learn the lesson of the log and the speck from Matthew 7 yet (Mt 7:3-5).

It is also a step forward that they are now talking about “my brother”. They are starting to feel the fact that they are dealing with someone of the same origin. When exercising discipline, it is always important that we realize that it should not be done from an attitude that we are better. Elihu, who had to warn Job about his statements about God, understood this. He aptly says to Job: “Behold, I belong to God like you; I too have been formed out of the clay. Behold, no fear of me should terrify you, nor should my pressure weigh heavily on you” (Job 33:6-7).

If this had been Israel’s mind, this battle would not have cost so many victims. If this had been the attitude in many disciplinary cases in the church, many excommunications would not have had to take place, or after a short period restoration could have taken place. Not all disciplinary cases could have been avoided. The church is obliged to exercise discipline because it owes it to the holiness of God. God can never allow anything of sin to exist among His people. But discipline should always be applied with a view to the restoration of the one who has sinned. It should not happen out of personal irritation or fear of losing face to the environment.

Before they go up, they first ask the LORD if they shall go up. That, too, is progress compared to the first time. Yet God also lets this second encounter result in a defeat for Israel. He has not finished with them yet.

Verses 26-28 | Preparation for the Third Encounter

26 Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

27 The sons of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God [was] there in those days, 28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, stood before it to [minister] in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."

Before the Israelites began the battle against the evildoers, they had expected an easy victory. They would do that job in a short time. After all, they were an overwhelming majority, weren't they? The result of this attitude, however, is that they have already been defeated twice. They don't understand anything about it anymore.

In their desperation they humbly and in tears turn again to the LORD in Bethel (meaning 'house of God') and ask Him if they need to go up again. They even start fasting. There is now no longer any question of coming together and going back to battle again. They realize that they have failed. It begins to dawn on them that God has something to say to them first.

Before they go to ask God, they offer "burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD". That's beautiful. By offering these offerings they say, as it were, that they can only exist before God on the basis of the value of these offerings. Both speak of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

The burnt offering shows this work as a work by which the Lord Jesus on the cross glorified God completely. It is an offering entirely reserved for God (Lev 1:1-17). On the basis of that offering God can bless His people and accept them. It is the only ground on which this can be done. For us this is beautifully expressed in Ephesians 1, where it says that God made us pleasant "in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6). Bringing a burnt offering means that we are aware that God sees us in the value of the work of the Lord Jesus and not on the basis of anything in ourselves.

The peace offering is a fellowship offering. It expresses that through the work of the Lord Jesus, fellowship is possible with God, with the Lord Jesus and with all members of God's people. A description of this offering can be found in Leviticus 3 and 7 (Lev 3:1-17; 7:11-21). Bringing this offering means that the consciousness is present of the fellowship that exists among the people of God.

Benjamin is also included in this. But because sin cannot have a place in this fellowship – it has been judged and is removed through the work of which this sacrifice speaks – sin must be judged. If there is then to be dealt with public sin among God’s people, it is from the meaning of this sacrifice and not from a personal grievance or a feeling hurt as a group. It is God’s purpose that Israel then (and we now) stand on the basis of these sacrifices. We are never in a position to act with someone else before God has been able to act with what is contrary to His Name in our own souls.

Another important aspect is that the whole people are involved. If there are exercises to exercise discipline in a particular case, these exercises should not be limited to a few brothers. It concerns the entire local church. This is not a secret sin, of which only a few know, but something that is generally known.

There is often little strength in the exercise of discipline because the exercise is often limited to a few who show a spiritual mind. If we really come to God’s presence with a disciplinary case, we can no longer be only indignant. Then there is real grief about what has happened among us and of what we ourselves are capable of.

There is also talk of “the ark of the covenant of God”. It is the only time that the book of Judges mentions the ark. The ark is a beautiful picture of Christ. He is the basis of all the actions of God with us and of our actions for God. By always keeping this in mind, we are kept from acting in the spirit of being better than the other. A proper judgment of evil and its elimination is no basis for fellowship. Our fellowship as saints is based only on Christ and His death. Only from this position evil can be judged. There, in picture, God must bring His people through the discipline He must allow.

This is not about a comparison between Benjamin and Israel, but about what is evil in the eyes of God and that it should be removed in the way He indicates. He cannot tolerate evil among His people because He dwells among His people. This applies in exactly the same way today for the local church gathers together in the Name of the Lord Jesus. He says of this: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Mt 18:20). Therefore, sin must be removed from a local church.

In the process to which God subjects His people to bring them into the right mind, the name of Phinehas is also mentioned. As noted earlier, this indicates that the period in which this event takes place must be just after the people have arrived in the promised land. Phinehas is a man who has fought for the honor of God in the wilderness. If evil has entered the camp, he judges it by killing the evildoers (Num 25:6-15).

We have to be zealous with God's zeal and not with our natural feelings. With Phinehas was a holy, priestly and spiritual indignation. With him we can perceive insight into God's thoughts. That the people come to him to consult the LORD through him also shows us that the people are where they should be.

We can say that Paul is the Phinehas of the New Testament. He has worked hard to make the will of God known in all churches. He has always fought when the believers threatened to deviate from Christ through wrong doctrine or wrong practices. It is to be hoped that each of us wants to be a Phinehas too.

Verses 29-48 | The Third Encounter

29 So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. 30 The sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and arrayed themselves against Gibeah as at other times. 31 The sons of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city, and they began to strike and kill some of the people as at other times, on the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, [and] in the field, about thirty men of Israel. 32 The sons of Benjamin said, "They are struck down before us, as at the first." But the sons of Israel said, "Let us flee that we may draw them away from the city to the highways." 33 Then all the men of Israel arose from their place and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush broke out of their place, even out of Maareh-geba. 34 When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them. 35 And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword. 36 So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah, 37 the men in

ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. 38 Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city. 39 Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." 40 But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up [in smoke] to heaven. 41 Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them. 42 Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them. 43 They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest [and] trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east. 44 Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors. 45 The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them. 46 So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors. 47 But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. 48 The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.

The third and final meeting between Israel and Benjamin is described in detail. It starts with the laying of ambushes. Here, as in the fight against Ai in Joshua 8, ambushes speak of acknowledging one's own weakness and counting on the hidden power of God. Victory is achieved by using resources hidden from the enemy. By fleeing, Israel openly acknowledges that it is weak. It does indeed seem weak to flee, but it gives the hidden resources, that is the ambushes, opportunity to do their work.

This is a beautiful illustration of prayer. Lying on your knees resembles weakness, but there is strength in it. Personal humiliation before God is the great secret to overcome. Therein strength is found for every exercise of discipline, both for parents toward their children and for the church toward the evildoers.

It is therefore not Israel that defeats Benjamin, but “the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel” (verse 35). First, the sons of Benjamin think that they will also be successful the third time. The previous victories have made them confident and even overconfident (verses 32,39). But this time God connects His blessing to the strategy Israel has chosen.

As soon as Benjamin leaves the city, the ambushed warriors appear, take possession of the unprotected city and set it on fire. In Deuteronomy 13 we also read about a city that has to be set on fire. That must happen if there are men there who have called for idolatry. It says that that city must be burned “as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God” (Deu 13:16). We can say that Gibeah’s sin is punished just as severely as the idolatry mentioned in Deuteronomy 13.

When the sons of Benjamin see the city burning, the victory tug turns into fear. They can’t believe their eyes, the shock is great. Their lust to fight fades away and they flee. Israel does not grant itself peace and chases the fugitives. In an almost ‘Jehu’s zeal’ they kill almost all the sons of Benjamin.

What the consequences of their far-reaching zeal are, we will see in the next and final chapter. The balance sheet can be drawn up for the time being. The victory is achieved, the evil judged. But there is also loss. Israel has lost about 40,030 men (verses 21,25,31). More than 25,000 men have died of Benjamin, through which the tribe nearly is eradicated. Only 600 men remain.

If someone doesn’t live in self-judgment, by which sin is given a chance to assert itself and others have to engage in it, it always results in loss. If those others are also involved in the removal of that sin in a nonspiritual way, the damage is incalculable. The only way to avoid becoming a source of misery, both for ourselves and for others, is to live in close fellowship with the Lord and in obedience to His Word.

Judges 21

Introduction

In the last chapter of the book the consequences of the dealings of Israel are shown. The solutions that are devised do not exactly speak of an undivided return to the LORD and a questioning of His will. The results are devastating both for families and other innocent people. And everything serves to avoid having to acknowledge one's own failure.

Verses 1-4 | Care for the Survival of Benjamin

1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage." 2 So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. 3 They said, "Why, O LORD, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be [missing] today in Israel?" 4 It came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

It is normal to celebrate a victory. That is not the case here. The victory is 'celebrated' with tears, there is a loud crying. More than 65,000 Israelites have been killed. The real enemies can cheer. They have so many opponents less. The enemy laughs hard inside when brothers fight each other. He has nothing to fear from brothers who knock each other out.

When Israel oversees the consequences after Benjamin's punishment, two things come to light. First of all, an oath has been sworn: no one shall give his daughter to the sons of Benjamin. Secondly, except for only 600 men, the entire tribe has been eradicated. If there was a glimmer of hope of survival for Benjamin, then the Israelites would have made it impossible by their oath.

This brings them to a call to God. What they put forward in their request to God shows that they have not really penetrated to the root of the problem. With all their weeping there is only a superficial understanding of what has happened. After all, they can answer their own questions. They themselves are the cause of it.

Also, the Corinthians could wonder why there are many sick and a number sleep (1Cor 11:29-32). This was not primarily due to the sick and those who died, but to the state of the whole. The chastisement is not only for those who experience the chastisement, but must be felt by the whole. Discipline over fellow believers should

1. not leave us indifferent as if it were only the others; and
2. not make us angry at God, as if He were acting arbitrarily.

God always has a purpose with His discipline. We may wonder to what extent God, through our own foolishness and carnal actions, has disciplined others in order to reach us.

The Israelites miss Benjamin anyway. Do we also feel it as a loss if someone had to be removed from among ourselves? Do the Israelites suddenly realize that the punishment has gone farther than intended? This gives their oath a threatening character. They can't get away from it and yet they want to provide Benjamin with women.

Before they come up with a solution, they first build an altar and then offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. They do what they also did in Judges 20 (Jdg 20:26). It seems that they do this because of the good effect the sacrifice has had and not with a heart that is in fellowship with God. It seems like a more or less superstitious act. They may have thought: If it worked then, it will work now. What they forget is that there it happened from a right mind. The sequel here shows that their hearts are not really with God.

Verses 5-14 | Providing Benjamin With Wives

5 Then the sons of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the LORD?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death." 6 And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today. 7 What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?" 8 And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah?" And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly.

9 For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. 10 And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones. 11 This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man." 12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan. 13 Then the whole congregation sent [word] and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them. 14 Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough for them.

In their zeal to fight evil, Israel has proclaimed a rash oath. They should never have sworn that oath. But instead of acknowledging that, they go in search of a solution. This oath must now be undone by a detour. This always happens when oaths are sworn without God's involvement. The result is a new fratricidal struggle.

They have also sworn another oath: anyone who does not go along to punish Gibeah's sin will be killed. After investigation it appears that Jabesh-gilead stayed at home. It is decided that Jabesh-gilead, who has shown indifference to evil, must suffer the same fate as evil. Jabesh-gilead argued that it didn't concern them and acted independently.

For our time we can learn from this that public sin found in one local church cannot leave another local church indifferent. All local churches have the same obligation to remove evil from among themselves (1Cor 5:13).

If a local church refuses to do so, others will have to deal with it. If all attempts to convince such a church to condemn evil fail, such a church can no longer be recognized as a church to which the Lord connects His Name. Such a church is identified with evil, and the Lord can no longer be in the midst of it.

Despite the fact that the Israelites' conclusion is correct, it appears that they are once again acting on the basis of a useful reasoning. They can make good use of this principle to solve a problem that has arisen through their own fault. They can even call upon Numbers 31 (Num 31:17-18) to

keep the girls alive. Thus they believe they can provide for the survival of Benjamin. Unfortunately, the number of girls is insufficient.

Verses 15-23 | Even More Women for Benjamin

15 And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. 16 Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?" 17 They said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel. 18 But we cannot give them wives of our daughters." For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, "Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin." 19 So they said, "Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah." 20 And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, 21 and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. 22 It shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, 'Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man [of Benjamin] a wife in battle, nor did you give [them] to them, [else] you would now be guilty.'" 23 The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the cities and lived in them.

All the discussions and actions in this chapter bear the hallmark of the last verses. Every Israelite is his own law. To God and His will is not asked. The oath they swore must be kept anyway. In order to keep their oath, they tear apart the closest family ties. Their conscience is quiet, but that has long since been blunted.

Everything is done according to what is good in their own eyes. Micah does what is good in his pious idolatry. His mother does what is good in her relationship with her son. The Danites do what is good in their wrong ways. The tribes do what is good by judging evil and swearing oaths. Everyone does what is good, but not what is good in God's eyes.

Now they also need 200 women for the remaining sons of Benjamin, without having to break the oath. A new idea is put forward. Strict ‘oath-keepers’ as they are, they of course can’t give their daughters, but they get the idea to catch girls. A feast of the LORD is an excellent opportunity for this, they judge. They don’t have to get dirty hands, the sons of Benjamin can do that themselves. Here, the Israelites encourage their brother to kidnap people, which is strictly forbidden by law, just to keep their oath (Exo 21:16).

This is reminiscent of the most horrible crime of all time, namely the death of the Lord Jesus. His opponents are also people with a very meticulous, but deformed, conscience. In order not to be defiled and to be able to eat the Passover, the leaders of the people do not enter the praetorium, while they wish nothing but the death of Him of Whom the Passover speaks (Jn 18:28). They deliver him to Pilate, that he may crucify Him (Jn 18:31). Then they do not have to murder Him themselves. In this way, a person can be very precise when it comes to not tainting himself with what he sees as wrong, while he, with the greatest ease, encourages others to commit the most serious crimes.

Benjamin is advised to steal the girls. Then the oath, in which they have sworn not to give them girls, is maintained and they do not have to break it. Benjamin follows their advice, from which we can conclude that they too have not come closer to God through all the events. The immorality found among them may have been punished, but it has not yet been expelled from the hearts.

Verses 24-25 | Everyone Does What Is Right in His Own Eyes

24 The sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one of them went out from there to his inheritance. 25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

The army is disbanded. All return to their own homes. Whether they have already learned the lesson, will become clear from the rest of their history. Did we learn the lesson? The last verse repeats the gloomy words with which this final part of the book began in Judges 17 (Jdg 17:6). Indeed no ‘happy end’ in this book.

In order to see that God, despite the decay of His people, in grace still carries out His plans and works toward His goal, we must read the book of Ruth. Just like Judges 17-21, that book is also a kind of appendix to the book of Judges, but in the opposite way. The book of Ruth begins with the words: "Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was ..." (Rth 1:1). What we read afterward is a beautiful scene of the grace of God. The book ends with the name 'David' (Rth 4:22), the man chosen by God to be king over His people. David is a type of the Lord Jesus.

What the Holy Spirit wants to work in us, when we have thus made the book of Judges speak to us, is that we desire to give control over our lives into the hands of the Lord Jesus. He also wants us to look forward to the time when everything in heaven and on earth will be subjected at the feet of the Lord Jesus.

What the Holy Spirit also wants to teach us through this book is that it is precisely in times of decay that we can achieve victories of faith. The author of the letter to the Hebrews cites a number of people who have lived by faith. Among them he mentions the names of people we have met in the course of our study of the book of Judges: "Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah" (Heb 11:32). They are part of the "great cloud of witnesses" about which he writes in Hebrews 12 (Heb 12:1). Then, in the same verse, he compares the life of the Christian who lives by faith with that of someone who takes part in a running match in the stadium.

We can have read the book of Judges as a spectator who looks from the grandstand at a spectacle in several parts. Then we weren't really involved then. What the Holy Spirit wants is that we experience the events. Then the roles are reversed. The grandstands are then populated by those countless believers of whom the writer in Hebrews 11 has mentioned a number and among whom are also the judges. And we are the ones they look at. Now it is our turn to run.

But the 'believers of old days' are there to encourage us. Do we see their radiant faces? Look at them and let them stimulate you. They know how difficult the match sometimes can be and what it takes to persevere. They have continued and have already reached the finish line.

This is why they call out to us, as it were: "Continue, persevere, do not give up, it is worth it!" That they have reached the final goal is the great incentive for us to persevere. This makes our commitment to the race of faith even greater. In doing so, we should not pay attention to the things around us. We should not look back either.

The only thing that matters is to keep our eye exclusively on Jesus, "the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb 12:2-3).

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