

**A.B. Simpson:**

"And they called the name of the place Bochim." Judges 2: 5.

The Book of Judges has a very important place in the plan of divine revelation. It expresses a truth of great importance, and a lesson of deep and solemn moment, namely, the danger of spiritual declension after great spiritual blessing. The Book of Numbers is a sad book, for it tells of the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness for forty years after God took them out of the land of Egypt. But the Book of Judges is a far more sad and solemn book, for it tells of the failure of Israel after they had entered the land of Promise, a failure that lasted not forty years, but four hundred years. It tells us of the danger of backsliding after we have received the Holy Ghost and known Jesus in His fullness, a danger most real and alarming. It is against this danger that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews so often and so solemnly warns the believers to whom that epistle was addressed, and bids them "give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end."

There is a place in the discipline of Christian life and the wise and faithful dealing of God with His people for both warning and promise, for both hope and fear. No one is so unsafe as he who recklessly dreams of safety without vigilance and obedience. God has planted beacons all along the way, not to discourage us with needless fear, but to save us by wholesome caution and vigilant obedience.

This book stands in a larger sense for the declension of the Church of Christ after the apostolic age, and it well represents the Dark Ages of Christian history; but in its individual application, it may also represent the danger in our personal Christian life, of going back even from the very baptism of Pentecost and the deepest and highest experiences of the Holy Ghost.

The story of Judges begins with a record of victory. "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the people asked the Lord, saying, 'Who shall go up against the Canaanites to fight against them?' And the Lord said, 'Judah shall go up; behold I have delivered the land into his hand.' And Judah said unto Simeon, his brother, 'Come up with me unto my lot that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with thee into thy lot.' So Simeon went with him. And Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and Perizites into their hand."

This was all as it should be, and manifested the spirit of faith, obedience, and humble dependence upon God. A little farther on we read that they even took Jerusalem, and they captured Hebron and other strongholds, and they pressed down to the country of the Philistines, and drove their enemies from most of their strongholds. It seemed as if they still possessed the victorious faith of Joshua, and had in their midst the same Almighty Presence of their divine Leader.

But soon we begin to see the first indications of the coming failure. First of all, Judah begins to pause in his career of triumph, and we read the first word of defeat and discouragement. (Chapter 1: 19.) "He could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." Soon after we read of the partial failure of Benjamin, "And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but the Jebusites dwelt with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem, unto this day." It was not "could not," now, but "did not."

Next we find Manasseh failing to drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and the neighboring towns. "But the Canaanites would dwell in that land." (Verse 27.) Next Ephraim becomes discouraged, and fails to drive the Canaanites from Gezer. (Verse 29.) Zebulun also allows the enemy to remain in his town. (Verse 30.) Asher yields to the inhabitants of Zidon and his cities; Naphtali fails to drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh. (Verse 33.) And Dan flees before the Amorites of his mountain land. So that there was scarcely a tribe of Israel that had not in some degree compromised with the enemy, and given place to their foes whom God has sent them to completely extirpate from the land.

The steps of their failure are very striking as we follow them in detail.

First. They simply let the enemy remain. They seemed to have had no fear of them, and just failed to completely exterminate them. Next, however, we find them deliberately putting them under tribute, and keeping them there for the purpose of making gain of them, and getting something out of them. This is where the world gets in, in our modern Christian life. We make terms with evil; we not only allow it, but we use it. We think there is no harm in taking the money of wicked men for religious objects, and meeting them half way. We are willing to be agreeable to the world in order to have a good influence over it, and we end by falling completely under its power. Next we find the Canaanites dwelling with Israel (chapter 1: 27); but a little later we find Israel dwelling with the Canaanites (3: 5 and 1: 33). Israel begins by treating the Canaanites as guests and tributaries, and ends

by finding them masters and conquerors.

Next we see the Canaanites driving the children into the mountains. They now have grown strong enough to dictate and demand as evil always does, after we have given it standing-room for a little while.

Next comes the intermarriage of God's people with the enemy. They meet in the social intimacies of life. They find the people of the world agreeable and profitable, and they consent to the forbidden fellowships and intermarriages of the godly and the ungodly, which in every age have preceded a time of corruption and great wickedness. No child of God has any right to intermarry with the ungodly, and a true parent dare not consent to such a union without involving the eternal well being of the child. It is never safe to disobey God, and I have no hesitation in saying that I would not perform such a marriage ceremony.

The next step is partnership in idolatry and the forsaking of Jehovah's worship for the shameful rites of heathenism. Chapter 3: 6, 7: "And they took their daughters to be their wives, and they gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods, and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves."

The culmination of all this soon came in the anger of Jehovah, and His severe and righteous judgment upon His disobedient people. And so we read, "The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies roundabout, so they could not any more stand before their enemies, and whithersoever they went out the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them; and they were greatly distressed." (Chapter 2: 14, 15.)

What a dreadful thing it is to have God against us and to know that He who controls the, very breath of our lives, and all the elements of destruction around us, is compelled by His very nature to deal contrary to us, and to consume us, even as fire must consume every combustible thing that it touches! God is compelled to be against sin, and while He pities the sinner He hates the sin; and while we are against God, His very presence must be to us a consuming fire, and even heaven would be hell to the sinful soul, and it would fly from the awful blaze of His holy glance as from a lightning flash and long to hide itself in hell.

But there is something even more sad than this, for we read that God gave them up to the power of their enemies, and allowed the Canaanites, whom they themselves had trifled with and taken into covenant, to be the thorns and snares of judgment and temptation to them.

There is nothing more terrible in all the judgments pronounced against them than this: "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." (Chapter 2: 3.)

"And He said, 'Because this people hath transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto My voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died. That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord, to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.'

And so God allowed them to be filled with their own devices, and tempted and tried by the very results of their own disobedience. Nay, further, we read in chapter 3: 8, that He even "sold them into the hands of their enemies," and gave their foes a power to subdue and enslave them which they themselves could never have claimed without the divine permission. Henceforth the Canaanite, the Philistine, the Syrian, and Assyrian, the Babylonian, and the Roman, were but the executioners of divine judgment, and wrought their conquests and captivities by direct divine permission.

Dear friends, all this represents a very awful truth, which the New Testament undoubtedly confirms, namely, that God's last and most terrible judgment is to allow the devil to have power over the disobedient soul, and to permit temptation to overcome and to torment and punish us because of our willful disobedience to the will of God, and our rejection of the grace that would have saved us. The saddest thing about the condition of the poor sinner is that while he thinks he is free, and has the power to reform and do as he pleases, he is the helpless slave of Satan, "taken captive by him at his will," and he never can be free until he repents and renounces the dominion of God's great enemy, and appeals to the blood of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost to break the fetters of his captivity.

And there may come a time in the life of a wicked man, when, through persistent rejection of light, and right, he

shall be given over, as we read in first chapter of Romans, "to a reprobate mind, and to vile affections," and he shall find within him a power compelling him to evil, and possessing him with the devil just as one can be possessed and constrained by the Holy Ghost.

This is the explanation of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. This is the last stage of impenitence and despair. This never comes to any soul until he has rejected and refused the mercy of God, and deliberately chosen evil instead of good, and Satan instead of God. God punishes him by letting him have Satan to the full, or as it is expressed so graphically in the first chapter of Proverbs, "They would none of My counsel, they despised all My reproof, therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." But it is possible even for the child of God to be delivered over to the power of temptation through a continuance in willful and persistent disobedience. The very things that we choose become our punishment, and we find ourselves through our own deliberate disobedience, under terrible forms of temptation which we have not the power to resist. The reason is that we are in a place where God never wanted us to be. We have brought upon ourselves our own tormentors. The grace of God is equal to all his will for us, and He knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, but He has not promised His grace for self-imposed burdens, dangers or situations that are contrary to His divine purpose.

There is nothing sweeter in life than to be conscious of being so encased in the armor of the Holy Ghost, that the Wicked One toucheth us not, and every fiery shot glances off, as the shot and shell are repelled by the armor plate upon the battleship, and we walk through the hosts of hell as safe and unscathed as if we were treading the courts of heaven. But there is also an experience where we are conscious that Satan has a power over our hearts, that the fiery dart does pierce through and stain the sensitive soul, that the evil instigation does become a part of our very thought and feeling, and that we are not in perfect victory over the power of evil. This is the meaning of the Master's prayer for us, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One."

Oh, beloved, this is the meaning of hell. This is the beginning of torment. This is the retribution of sin. This is something even more bitter than the wrath of God. It is the culmination of the first step of unbelief, disobedience and spiritual declension. Let us guard against the first step, and let us ask Him to save us from the causes which led His people of old into these depths of wretchedness and sin.

## II. The causes of Israel's failure.

The first cause was incomplete and unfinished work. They did not thoroughly finish the battle; they entered into compromises with evil; they failed to be thorough and whole-hearted in their dealing with Him. Let us look well to it, that we give no place to the devil, and that we allow the world and the flesh no standing ground.

All Satan asks is toleration of a single root of bitterness, unbelief and self-indulgence; but as surely as God is true, that single sin will destroy us in the end.

Again, they failed to recognize their temptations as God's provings to see what they would do. He allowed these things to come that He might test their obedience, and so He lets temptations come to us not that they may overcome us, but that they may establish us. If we would ever recognize them as God's tests, and rise above them to meet His higher will, they would become occasions for grander victories and higher advances.

But, thirdly, the real secret of their failure was their lack of a true, personal and independent hold upon God as the source of their strength. There is one passage in the opening verses of this book which explains the whole situation. (Judges 2: 7.) "And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that He did for Israel." Here we see the cause of the whole trouble. They leaned upon Joshua, and Joshua's immediate successors more than they leaned upon God. They got their ideas and inspirations from human leaders, but they did not stand personally rooted and grounded in God for themselves, and when the shock of conflict came they failed. Indeed, their own language on a previous occasion shows that they did not really understand their own helplessness, and their utter need of Jehovah.

In the closing chapter of the Book of Joshua we read, that when that great leader had gathered the people together at Shechem, and had given them his parting charges, they answered with unreserved assurance, "We will serve the Lord, for He is our God," and Joshua answered them, "Ye cannot serve the Lord." (Joshua 24: 19.)

Doubtless what Joshua meant was they could not in their self-confident strength do anything but fail and sin. But they had not learned the lesson, and, confident in their self-sufficiency they did fail and sink into the lowest

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depth of sin and misery, and the triumphs of Jericho, Bethhoron, Hebron and Gibeon ended in the tears of Bochim, and the captivity of their foes.

Thank God there is an antipodes to Bochim. It is that other place of which the inspired prophet has said, "Thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah" (Isaiah 62: 4). Bochim is the place of weeping; Beulah is the place of love and joy. Bochim means the failure of our strength; Beulah means married unto Him, and kept by His power from stumbling and from failure.

Let us go to Bochim, and learn our helplessness, and then let us go forth to Beulah, and, leaning upon His love and strength go forward, singing: "Thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ Jesus;" "I can do all things through Christ, who is my strength."