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Editorial: "Signs of the Times"

Jim Brown

With little variation, it seems that whenever the subject of "end times" is broached, a default to Matthew 24:6-7's short list of physical signs is cited by many: wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes in divers places". However, the nature of the disciples' inquiry in verse three and the Lord's answer are both instructive. Their question, though originally elicited from the Lord's prophecy of Jerusalem's pending A.D. 70 destruction, is re-centered upon events leading up to the Lord's literal coming to earth to establish His kingdom. Note that at the time this conversation took place, the catching away of the church was still a mystery, yet to be revealed some 25-30 years later by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

In 1 Chronicles 12:32, we are told there were 200 men from the tribe of Issachar who "understood the times". Not that we should all be obsessed with acute details of current events, but we should seek to be saints who are aware of how: 1) the Lord distinguishes the signs for Israel preceding His actual return to earth from 2) signs that point to the church being called home in the air.

The result of a small amount of research shows that, in the natural sense, the scoffers in 2 Peter 3:3-5 are not inaccurate as to their claim that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation". There is a great deal of concern about various global conflicts today, but the truth is, since World Wars 1 and 2, the loss of life due to war is quite minimal over the last 80 years. Those two world wars combined, depending on which data source used, claimed over 70 million lives. Since 1945, the Korean, Vietnam, Gulf, Afghanistan, Russia vs. Ukraine and Gaza Strip wars compile a very small fraction of that number. So, it would seem, statistically, there's been a downshift in the last 80 years.

The same can be said for global famine, diseases and earthquakes. A quick review of man's time on earth

would show that there have been periods of much greater famines and pestilences in terms of death percentages per existing populations. Strange as it may seem, COVID 19 ranks as one of the smaller death-per-capita health epidemics in man's history! And the perusal of earthquake charts shows a much more devastating, and higher concentration of events dating back to the 9th century. The point is that we really cannot express the items in Matthew 24:6-7 as being relative to the soon coming of our Lord to the air for His church. Those signs are for Israel, beginning at Matthew 24:8 and are to be understood as signs marking "the beginning of sorrows" in Daniel's 70th week prophecy to begin the first three-and one-half years prior to the midway point (Matthew 24:15) of those seven years. This is where "the time of Jacob's trouble" begins with the revelation of the 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 "man of sin" in Jerusalem, the Antichrist, who claims to be God, sitting in the temple as God.

To summarize regarding the end time signs for Israel spoken of by the Lord in Matthew 24:6-7, note carefully they are physical, medical, geological, and even meteorological later in the chapter. Remember also, the Jews seek after a sign in 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. They are still waiting for their Messiah to come for the very first time, having rejected Him in His first advent. Contrarily, those who comprise the church, whether physically dead or alive, await the glorious resurrection of the just (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, John 5:28-29). As such, the signs to be realized and understood by the church awaiting the call home are not the same as those signs for Israel awaiting their Messiah.

To understand the signs of the times for those of us in the church, we turn our attention away from current wars, rumors of wars, famines, disease and earthquakes to elements that mark out a spiritual and moral apostasy. What we observe today is making it increasingly clearer what the world will be like, morally, when all the Christians are removed from it. Can one even begin to imagine, a complete lawlessness without restraint, the 8.5 billion-soul outpouring of Jeremiah's 17:9's "desperately wicked" heart? There can hardly be found a better explanation of these signs given in scripture than 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and Revelation 3:14-17. Paul references "last days" or, as we may term it, end times. The Lord addresses the blindness of the Laodiceans as to their perilous condition (wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked) before God against the backdrop of their own misguided assessment, smug in their self-sufficiency. They are in a local church setting, yet clueless as to how bad things have become. What a sham will be, rather, currently is being carried on in Christendom by those

having heard the soul-delivering testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, both fully rejecting Him while still clinging to a loose connection with His name. Paul writes of them as "having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof". These false ones are also identified by Paul using a host of unflattering adjectives, any of which could be placed over so many of today's worst news headlines. They very succinctly paint a portrait of Christendom's violent, corrupt, selfish, and in general, gross misrepresentation of true Christianity. Ranging from violent opposition and rebellion to callous indifference and ignorance, the signs of the times for the end of the church age need no more clarity than the letter Paul wrote to Timothy or the letter the Lord wrote to the church of Laodicea. Without the Spirit of God to help these false professors embrace the offer of mercy they had despised for so long, it would seem they will keep right on going in form without power after the true church is taken to heaven,

even to gladly serve/worship the man of sin, while under delusion, not even knowing the difference.

Brethren and sisters, we could hear news of a country attacking another country with a nuclear warhead...or ten earthquakes in the next ten consecutive days, all registering 10.0 on the Richter scale; but it still would not signal the Lord's soon return to the air to call us home. No additional prophecy needs to be fulfilled before we're caught away. Instead, with one look at the degree to which absolute truth is evaporating from our society, declining moral turpitude on all levels with no fear of being caught, tried, convicted and sentenced, all compounding the increase of unchecked hatred, violence, vile corruption in the world, we know the Lord must be coming back for us soon! Paul was careful to precede his list with the terms "perilous" and "latter days". That's how we can sense the timing of the state of things seen today. One wonders, could it get much worse? Paul's (and the Lord's to Laodicea) descriptive adjectives are signs of Christendom's final apostasy, as awful as they are. They're not to be rejoiced over or criticized by us, but they do contribute to a sense of anticipation with heavenly exhilaration rather than the world's earthly despair of its pending doom. "Behold, I come quickly."

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Editors: Joel Portman & Jim Brown

Publisher: Joel Portman

1200 Forest Glen Ct. SE,
Cedar Rapids, IA, 52403

All Correspondence to: mail@truthsforourday.com

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Reality in Service

Some time ago a brother stood up on a public platform and said: "It is several years since I have been able to stand on a platform and preach; but it is only a few months since I received power to live for God in private life." Now it will be readily admitted that it needs more grace to live for God in private life than it does to stand on a platform and preach—that is, looking at the thing from a manward point of view; and, in making his confession, the brother opened up a subject of vaster importance than many are aware of. Power to live for God in private life! Is it not a neglected subject? Is it not one from which there is a general shrinking? When the body is in a wasted condition, we do not care to look much at that pale, emaciated face in the looking glass. It tells us too much. We would rather not examine it too closely. And it is the same when the soul has gotten wasted by lack of the heavenly unction and dearth of the heavenly dew.

Nowhere is barrenness of soul more conspicuous than in private life. In the social circle beside the "homestead hearth," we appear something near to what we really are. Restraint is there thrown off, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. It is in private life that we leave our true impress on those around us, be the impress good or bad. It is what we are—not what we preach—that is the true measure of our influence on those around. In these days preachers are like books; there is no end of them. But it is no breach of charity to say that there

is a terrible scarcity of what we might call Holy Ghost preaching. As a brother, now far away in the foreign field, once said to us: "Have you ever observed what a dearth there is of the ministration of the Spirit?" Is it not an interesting inquiry to ask the question: "Why is there so much platform preaching that seems entirely to lack the energizing power of the Spirit of God? Why is so much preaching that falls flat and dull on the ears of both saint and sinner, causing one sometimes to wonder if the Lord is in this place at all?" We make bold to answer the question by saying: It is because such preachers are not living for God in private life. They may be as eloquent as an Apollos, or as learned as a Gamaliel; but if the living waters are not flowing in private life, they will not flow from the platform. One's very consciousness of these inconsistencies in himself, will hamper him seriously on the platform, if he have any conscience left. But the sad thing is that many preachers seem to have no conscience in the matter. They can be as solemn on Sunday as if the end, of all things were at hand; and on Monday they can be as jocular as the very worldling—one day ministering as the messenger of God and the same day enjoying the world's jokes, or making jokes to laugh at! These are no imaginary things. They are too sadly true.

Preaching has become a kind of profession; it is done for the most part as a matter of business; and many who "take no titles" have caught the infection. It is looked upon as a "nice thing" to preach. One is considered a good way up when he can occupy a quarter of an hour or so—in a word, preaching has become popular. And what is the result? The result is that untried, unproved men are rushing in "where angels fear to tread." Men who should be ruling their own houses are found attempting to rule the Church of God. Men rise to teach, who have never learned to rule their own spirit; and dear, godly, simple brethren are carried away by the same current, and fancy they are never right unless when they are preaching, while they forget that their true place in the body may be a much more obscure one than the one to which they aspire. Brethren, let us see that we do not get ensnared by a mere desire to hear our own voice. We do not say, let there be less preaching; no, but we do say let there be an honest heart-searching before God, to see that, in private life, we are living in the power of the Holy Ghost.

If there were as great a desire to live for God in private as there seems to be to preach in public, there would be a revival such as we rarely see. Let us ponder this—all of us who seek to serve God in any way, whether it be in public preaching, house visitation, giving away a tract, or standing with the Lord's people on the street—if the solemnity of eternity and the joy of the Lord do not go with us in private life, our public utterances will only be "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." The man who has power with God in the closet is the man who has power with God in public. If the power of God in private life be lacking, you may, nevertheless, be reckoned a great preacher, and be accepted of men; but the judgment seat

will reveal what God's thoughts have been. Many a brilliant preacher has seemed quite a different individual after staying in some saint's house for a week; because the "platform power" seemed to be utterly lacking in his private life.

Beloved, let us be without hypocrisy. Let us not appear to be what we are not. Above all, let us see that the power of Christ is resting on us in private life, remembering that we are all the while as really in His presence as when in the meeting of the saints. And if, in private life, we maintain our character as separated ones to God, our public services shall be ordered of Him. The Lord shall open our lips, and they shall show forth His praise.
WIS Oct 1943

A Remedy for Discouragement

Believer's Magazine, Sept. 1940

Perplexity regarding events, problems, and doubts about moral principles and inexplicable activities on a global level can unconsciously lead us to discouragement or even despair. We have already noted that Habakkuk was concerned because God was not intervening in world affairs. That divine silence seemed to contradict every principle established by God for the government of His creature, man. But Habakkuk cast his complaint against the backdrop of his knowledge of God. His spirit of contention disappeared and his faith triumphed, because that knowledge withstood the test of experience. He found an irrefutable rock on which to stand, and there he stood, firm, unshakable, and almost defiant. Where did the prophet's confidence come from? He took courage in the Name of his God: and that "Name" is not merely a combination of letters, but the meaning it has. Knowledge of that Name generates confidence. And it is not merely theoretical or inactive; it is robust, active, dynamic, bold. It not only has the ability to persevere with nobility, but also to demonstrate with energy, because "the people who know their God will strive and act" (Daniel 11:32). Habakkuk It was the eternal character of God that arrested, enervated, and encouraged the prophet amid the confusion of inexplicable events. The deeds of men were but episodes in a world where divine purpose was unfolding slowly but inexorably.

The reality that God was from the beginning gave Habakkuk the assurance that He was aware of the whole plan. Man's limited horizons did not allow him to see the purpose of what appeared to be a contradiction of God's ways and a setback to the cause of justice. But now, in Habakkuk's concept of the universe, men were merely actors on the stage of time. God was the sovereign controller of action and counteraction. The final outcome would come, and justice would not be defeated.

This God does not die (so says the Jewish version of Habakkuk 1:12). Nations such as the ancient Chaldeans and their numerous descendants may rise up in their pride and arrogance and defy God and His principles of justice. They may seemingly delay or even destroy the purpose of the Almighty. But despite their successes, He continues to live, while they have been shattered and their empires have perished in the dust. Habakkuk, steadfast in the face of the imminent threat to national and individual prosperity, saw God watching over His own.

His confidence was not based on a philosophical abstraction, on a disinterested Deity, on the invention of a religious mind. His God was not one who was disconnected from personal experience. He was "Jehovah, my God, my Holy One." This was a Person whose faithfulness to the covenant relationships with His creature had engendered a trust that did not waver when tested by the pressure of inexplicable events. The weight of the accumulated testimony of centuries of history (preserved for the prophet in the Old Testament) was thrown into the balance in favor of the man who was willing to believe, even though appearances seemed to contradict his argument. Jehovah could not but remain true to His character; He could not deny Himself.

Habakkuk knew God in an even more intimate, more personal way. God was more than the Jehovah of history. He was the prophet's personal God. The words "my God" reveal the man's conviction, the product of his experience. He could face the crisis of a difficult situation with the knowledge he had gained from his daily experience of communion with God. In the quiet days of his past life, Habakkuk had been treasuring in his spirit an awareness of God, which now controlled his attitude and sustained his faith. He knew God in the crisis because he had walked with Him in the easy days when the heart is normally careless about divine realities. Blessed is the man who can turn to the God he has learned to trust when the sun was shining on his path.

Habakkuk's faith is summed up beautifully in the words of Karl Barth: "Grace...gives certainty to what the believer does, certainty amid a thousand mistakes, weaknesses, and vanities...certainty amid great uncertainties. Faith in God...has the same characteristics of freedom, immutability, and self-sufficiency as God Himself."

Departure from God and its Results

(a partial quotation of "Consider their Latter End", a study of Deuteronomy 32:29, Assembly Testimony, 1952)

A. McShane

illustrates their rebellion against the Lord after they had tasted the fruits of Canaan. Their hearts, estranged from Him, began to go after idols, which consequently received the portion due to Him alone.

Let us guard our affection for Christ, for if the heart be not fully satisfied with Him it will readily put some other object in His place. The idol may be our families, our home, our companions, our wealth, or even so called harmless sport; but whatever it is, it will be our ruin unless we have grace to repent.

From verse 19 Moses portrays in the most solemn terms the tragic outcome of Israel's departure from God. It must have been painful for him to think that the future of such a favoured people should be so black. The face of God hidden, His arrows spent upon them, and their being scattered to the corners of the earth, were the terrible consequences of their sin. It was little wonder that their dying leader, as he foresaw all this evil, exclaimed, "O that they were wise . . . that they would consider their latter end!"

Departure from God and His word may be viewed lightly by some, but its seriousness can only be ascertained when we consider its end. If, for example, a Christian were to disobey the Scriptures and marry an unconverted partner, who could tell the sad results which will inevitably accrue? Indeed, if only a fraction of the cost involved were realized, it would be sufficient to halt any who might venture on such a perilous course. Other wrong steps, in private life, might be mentioned, to which the same principle would equally apply, but we shall leave these for the reader's own consideration.

We must bear in mind that in assembly life also God always punishes departure from Himself and His Word; let us not, therefore, be so foolish as to imagine that we can drift into laxity and not reap the consequences. What will be the end, for instance, if strange children are brought into fellowship? What untold trouble might they ferment, especially if they are pushed into positions of leadership, to the grief of godly saints and possibly the ruin of their own souls? Have we yet pondered what the end will be of the present desire on the part of some assemblies to mix with denominations? Will not the outcome be that eventually such churches will become little better than missions? Have we lost our hatred for clerisy with all its attendant evils, so that now in some circles association therewith is viewed with complacency and even pleasure? Have we considered the loss of power in many meetings, partly due to the increased tendency to substitute human arrangements for the sovereign leading of the Holy Spirit? Would it not be our wisdom to consider these and other indications of departure from God, and to seek grace to return to Him ere their consequences befall us!

Repentance and Restoration

There is a close similarity between the principles upon which God saves sinners and those upon which He

Israel's apostasy began, like most others, with ungratefulness. The figure of a fat ox kicking its owner

restores erring saints. The reason that many talk of being restored, yet give no evidence of radical or lasting change in their lives, is that they have not been the subjects of God's dealings at all, but rather of human persuasion or emotional excitement.

There are three simple, yet important conditions of restoration suggested in these verses that are worthy of our earnest attention. First, God's backsliden people are to be taught the vanity of all false objects of worship—"Where are their gods whom they trusted . . . let them rise up and help you" (vv. 37-38). Secondly, they must learn their own helplessness—"when He seeth that their power is gone" (v. 36). Thirdly, they will have to realize that their forgiveness is based upon the atonement—"He will be merciful unto (lit. make expiation for) His land and to His people" (v. 43). No object that displaces God will deliver us in times of trouble, so whatever our circumstances may be we ought to cleave to Him alone. Neither can we find within ourselves any help for our souls, for we are as helpless to restore as to save. It was when Jonah fainted and condemned lying vanities (idols) that he experienced deliverance. We must also bear in mind that the precious blood of Christ is the only ground of pardon, and its virtue avails for all who repent of their sin and seek forgiveness from Him who delighteth in mercy.

Israel's restoration, like all others, will have far reaching effects upon the world. Its peace, prosperity and salvation ail await the recovery of God's earthly people. "What shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15). And would not our own restoration result in much blessing to the unsaved around us? Well might our prayer be, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation . . . Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee" (Psalm 51:12-13).

Similarities between Judges and Revelation 2-3

Joel Portman

A study of the book of Judges in relation to the letters to the seven churches and the characteristics of the church age indicates a correspondence that we can observe between the two. We will summarize briefly some of those relationships and then develop them further in our analysis of the book.

Their Good Beginning

First, we see that in both cases, God's people began well. However, even with their good beginning, there were the seeds of ultimate failure to be found among them and seen in their actions. This good beginning, for Israel, was based on their being in a right position, possessing the

land and enjoying that inheritance that had been secured for them. They were enjoying the fruits of the faithfulness and ability of Joshua as described in the previous book.

We find that this was true of the church in Acts. The believers were established in the truth of God, having come out by being separated from identification either with Judaism, or with their past pagan associations. The Holy Spirit had opened to their view the panorama of truth concerning all that was theirs in Christ. By the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:43, 13:1) they were being fed the truths given by the Holy Spirit of God. More truth was to be unfolded to their understanding as God gave gift to local assemblies and gifted men to the church (1 Corinthians 13:9-12, Ephesians 4:9-17). Just like Israel in the land, they began to enjoy the plenitude that God had intended for them in their redemption.

Writing to the assembly in Ephesus, the Lord calls attention to their knowledge of truth by which they had tested those who proved to be false (Revelation 2:2-3). That knowledge was coupled with their works, labor and patience, so it was proven in reality of life and conduct. Thus we see that a similarity exists between the initial position and beginning of both Israel and the early church.

Early Zeal and Desire for Progress

Then, we note that immediately they displayed zeal and a desire to move forward through conflict to possess the inheritance that was theirs more fully. In Judges, Judah took the lead to exercise the rightful authority that the Lord had entrusted to them. This was an authority and leadership that is linked with Christ (Genesis 49:10). As they began the work to conquer the foe, they depended on God to lead and give the power needed, and we see that the Lord worked on their behalf and delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hand (Judges 1:4). In addition, the people displayed a desire to move forward in fellowship with their brethren (Judges 1:3, 17), a characteristic that we also observe in the early church activities. This good beginning should continue to characterize us in our activities and service for God today; self-sufficiency and independence from our brethren is not a good thing and usually demonstrates a spirit that is opposed to God's principles.

Early Indications of Failure

Next, however, we cannot help observing the early development of failure. Perhaps, contradicting what we have said in the previous paragraph, the dependence of Judah on Simeon indicated a lack of confidence in God. Their inclusion can be justified by knowing the close relationship their territories had (Simeon's possession actually lay within that of Judah, Joshua 19:1). Nevertheless, it was an indication of Judah's failure when they depended on Simeon for success in the battle

rather than to depend wholly on God. God had told Judah to go up but had said nothing about Simeon.

This also suggests a constant problem in Christian testimony and service; there often seems to be an inability to depend unreservedly and confidently on the power of God to accomplish His work. Fellowship in work is good and commendable, but a fine line exists between that fellowship and an unwillingness to place complete confidence in the Lord. In addition, we observe that, from the outset, they failed to drive out the former possessors of the land (Judges 1:19, 21, 27, etc). They were only partially victorious, though God had commanded them to drive them *all* out of the land. God knew the dangers of those nations remaining in the land and it was for their preservation as a nation that He commanded to destroy and drive them out. As a result of their failure, Israel lost their separation and mingled themselves among the people (Judges 1:21, 27, 29, 30, etc). This inevitably led to more weakness, and ultimately, to their downfall.

We see the same pattern emerging in this period of the church. Initial separation and judgment of evil associations soon gave way to compromise and intermingling with the unsaved. This was the characteristic of some in Corinth (1 Corinthians 10) and also seems to have been true of other gatherings. We especially see it in the case of Pergamos in Revelation 2, where the church joined hand in hand to walk with the world, enjoying a closeness to the world that resulted in distance from the Lord.

These seven major nations of Judges (Deuteronomy 7:1) may have seemed overwhelming due to their power, but that was because Israel had gotten their eye off God. Of course, they could make many excuses, such as the enemy having greater weapons and chariots of iron (Joshua 17:14-18, Judges 1:19). Excuses only indicate unbelief operating in the hearts of God's people. Early on, they had left their "first love." The nations also became attractive to them, so that they learned and practiced their ways, including their religious customs. It is not difficult to see the same pattern emerging in the church period, and inevitably, this is always the result of a breakdown of separation by God's people. The nations of Canaan represent spiritual powers that are hostile to God's people, both internal and external powers that work to prevent blessing and fruitfulness through faithfulness to the Lord.

Development of Failure

We notice that as time progresses in Israel's history in Judges as well as in that of the churches, the enemy's power seemed to increase. Servitude to the nations was generally for longer periods of time as the book progresses. This was, in large part, due to their increasing sinfulness and distance from God. We can see this trend suggested from the chart below:

Nation in Power		Years of Servitude
Mesopotamia	(3:8)	8
Moab	(3:14)	18
Canaan	(4:3)	20
Midian	(6:1)	7
Ammon, Philistines	(10:7)	18
Philistines	(13:1)	40

From this, we see that as time progressed, the power of the people of God seemed to decrease while the power of the enemy increased. Without doubt, we can see the same pattern displayed in the church age, with less power to overcome and progress spiritually now than there was in the past. That pattern marked the first 2-300 years of the church, especially upon the apostles' passing and the death of those who immediately followed them. It follows the example of Israel in Judges 2:10, when, with subsequent generations, there eventually "*arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor the works which He had done for Israel.*"

Not only were there generally longer periods of servitude in Judges, but it is remarkable that their expressed desire for deliverance gradually decreased. In Judges 2:4, the people wept when the angel of the Lord came to Bochim and reproved them. This is the only time we read that they wept before the Lord until chapter 20:23, 26 when their brother-tribe Benjamin defeated them on two occasions and later when they had nearly annihilated Benjamin. So we learn that there was decreasing sensitivity to God's voice, and a sad lack of self-judgment with repentance, a condition that is not unknown in our day as well.

In addition, in Judges 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10 (5x) they cried to the Lord for deliverance from enemy domination. In ch. 6:10, they didn't respond to God's warning but, even worse, in ch. 13:1 there is no cry for deliverance at all. They were satisfied to remain under Philistine bondage. Moreover, in ch. 15:11, they were quite ready to deliver Samson into the hands of the Philistines rather than to support him in his work against the enemy! This only indicates a weakening condition that eventually resulted in their being content to submit to God's enemies rather than depend on the Lord and move in faithfulness to Him and His Word.

Likewise, in the church age we see a similar spiritual state in which the elements of the spiritual powers of this world have so influenced what is called "Christian testimony" that in some cases it is hard to discern what is truly of God and what is of the world!

Less Spiritual Judges

Along with this condition of placid acceptance, we note that the judges that God raised to deliver and rule His people were progressively less spiritual as the book moves forward. It can be noted that from Othniel to Ehud there is a decline, though not so marked as that from Ehud to Barak, who was a man who refused to obey God

without Deborah going with him to battle (Judges 4:8)! From Gideon to Jephthah we see a marked decline. The character of the two men is a contrast: Gideon was occupied with threshing wheat to get food for himself and the people during a time of adversity, but Jephthah had been expelled by his brethren and lived with vain men. In addition, Gideon responded directly to God's call to deliver Israel without any preconditions, but Jephthah was called by the people and only served after bargaining with them (Judges 11:7-10). We could mark other contrasts by means of a study of these two men, such as their character following the victory: Gideon appeased his brethren with soft words (8:1-3) and refused to rule over the people while Jephthah killed his opposing brethren (12:1-6) and wanted a place of prominence.

If there is a contrast between these two judges, we note that the difference between Jephthah (including all the preceding judges) and Samson is vast. In Samson we find a man who had the most ability naturally, the most power, the most "gift" from God coupled with the most carnality, self-centeredness and complete lack of any genuine spiritual exercise to deliver Israel. For example, we see a man who never prayed except for his own deliverance from his enemies (Judges 15:18, 16:28). In addition, he mainly exercised his great power to accomplish his own desires for vengeance or for personal gain. He represents the sad decline and spiritual departure seen so evidently today that has been marked over the course of the church age.

We also can say that this decline seen in the judges only reflected the continuous spiritual decline of the people from which they arose and who they were called to lead. They were the product of their day, some better, but others much the same. This is also true of those who function as leaders among the saints of the church age; they cannot be separated from the milieu of believers with which they are associated and from which they come. If there is weakness among the saints, there also will be that same weakness reflected in those who are their leaders. In addition, weakness in the leaders will produce weakness in the saints.

The End Condition

Finally, at the end of Judges, we see complete indifference to spiritual departure among them as evidenced by Micah and his house of idols that he built (17:1-6). We recognize that these chapters describe events that took place historically much earlier in the book. If these events took place earlier in Israel's history, what must their condition have been at the end of the period of the Judges? These chapters have been placed here for, we believe, a definite purpose. God is showing that this will be the marked characteristic at the end of this church age. Israel could tolerate that kind of evil among them at this point without any objection.

However, following that sad but accepted condition, we note the moral degeneration that inevitably follows spiritual evil, (Judges 19). It is most interesting that while the spiritual, idolatrous evil was not condemned, the nation was extremely severe in judging the moral results that flowed from it so that they virtually exterminated a tribe of Israel! Is this not the case with Christendom? Elements of Babylonish religion are accepted and incorporated into "Christian" worship, even while there may be abhorrence of moral evil. However, since *"every man did that which was right in his own eyes,"* inevitably moral depravity will enter in and cause great ruin to the entire testimony that God intends to be sacred for Himself.

As in Romans 1, spiritual declension and rejection of what God has revealed about Himself will always lead to further degeneration in the moral climate of men. This makes clear that men cannot reform or maintain a right moral condition when they reject God and ignore His truth. This is the present case and condition of the religious world in which we live near the end of this age. May God preserve us in a discerning and separating walk, seeking to please Him in all we do or say.

Where are We?

If we were to identify ourselves with any particular condition depicted in Judges, where would we place ourselves? We hope that we could relate to those who faithfully sought to uphold God's truth and deliver the people. It is obvious, though, that in general we are in the midst of those conditions depicted in the last part of the book. Sadly, it seems clear that increasingly most everyone is inclined toward doing what is right in his own eyes and is not seeking the mind of God for guidance. It is easy to look at difficulties that exist and then devise means that seem right to deal with those problems. However, it may be that those innovative changes are only an expression of this characteristic, and the result will be worse than the first. There is great need today for recovery to the truth of God, even among those who profess to be gathered alone to the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ in simple assembly testimony. May God work to this end for the preservation of such gatherings for His own Name's sake!

We would hope that these features and their resemblance to church age characteristics will become clearer as we proceed. We do not intend to excessively force the picture on the passage or go far beyond what is written. We only make the comparison and suggestions that we see at times as shadows but not clearly. However, there is much in this book that we can learn about the day in which God has called us to maintain responsible testimony for Him. We will have to answer to Him when our day of service is over. May God teach us some things through this book that would preserve us in our pathway for our blessed Lord.

Priority One

“For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived that He might be LORD both of the dead and living.” Romans 14:9
(This is a true story narrated by Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse to illustrate Romans 14:9.)

Mr. Kim had a problem, he said, and he wanted some advice. “A year or two ago” he began, “I received a letter from a friend. This friend was a young dentist. He wanted to move to our city and start a dental practice here. Since I’m a businessman who knows the city, he asked me to find him a place that he could use as a home and office combined. Now, as we all know, there’s been a great housing shortage. But I did all I could to help him. Finally I found a place and wrote him about it. I told him the house was in bad condition. There was a hole in the wall, and the roof leaked. The house was in a very bad neighborhood. On top of all that, the price was much more than the house was worth. Although I told him all these problems, my friend sent me a telegram telling me to buy the house.”

“A day or so later, I got a check from him to cover the down payment, so I signed the papers to buy the house. The owner agreed to vacate the house in three days. But when the time was up, the owner asked for a few more days to find another house. I granted him this period of grace. But after a week he was still there. Two weeks, three weeks, a month, three months, six months have passed. The man who sold the house has bought fancy clothes for himself and his family, and they are eating expensive food. He knows that I am a Christian and that in Korea we Christians never go to court against other Christians, and we try not to go to court against unbelievers. He laughs at me when I come.”

Mr. Kim was saying all this in a somewhat unusual setting. He was at a gathering of church elders in Korea, and he had been asked to lead their morning devotions. But instead of saying something inspirational about God, he was telling them this bizarre story and asking their advice.

What a strange problem! Who ever heard of selling a house for a big price and then not letting the new owner move in? The buyer’s money was tied up in property he couldn’t use, and the man who wouldn’t leave was spending the money on luxuries. “What am I to do?” Kim asked his fellow elders. After a brief discussion, they all agreed, he had the right to go to the authorities and have the man evicted.

“Thank you, Fathers and Brethren,” said Kim, “for considering my problem. Before I sit down, I wish to draw one conclusion. Long ago the Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven to purchase for Himself a dwelling place.” Kim pointed to Himself and continued, “He bought this old shack. It was in rundown condition. It was in a bad neighborhood. He bought me because he wanted to take possession of me and dwell in my heart. He gave Himself for me, and He gave me the Holy Spirit as a down payment, bringing me countless blessings. But I cling to my dwelling and leave Him outside. Now if you say that I have the right to seek the help of the authorities to evict the man who is occupying my friend’s house, what shall you

and I say of ourselves when we deny the Lord Jesus Christ the full possession of that for which He gave his own life?”

Everything Lord Jesus Christ did, He did in order to establish His reign as LORD and to take possession of us. Are we like that old landlord?

We might modify that story to apply it to many cases in our lives.. The house is sold and the seller is supposed to yield complete control of the house to the new owner. But the seller says, “I didn’t really mean for you to have the entire house. You don’t really need it all and I would like to continue to use and enjoy it. So I’ll be generous and you can have that room in the corner. It has enough space for you and a door to the outside so you can come and go. But I’ll keep the rest of the house for me to use. The house will actually be yours but I’ll keep on using part of it for myself.

Is that what we do with the life that the Lord has purchased for Himself? In practice? Sadly, it is true.

Moses: My Servant, pt 1

“So Moses the servant of LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word (lit. “mouth” – JND, Newberry, “kiss”) of the LORD. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, overlooking Beth-peor: but no man knoweth his sepulchre unto this day”
(Deuteronomy 34:5-6)

Alan Davidson

This was a unique token of approval for His faithful servant; the man whom God called, “**Moses My Servant**” (Joshua 1:2).

The life of Moses covers four books in our Bible. His name occurs about eight hundred times in Scripture. In the account of the life of Moses given in Hebrews chapter 11, the expression, “By faith” occurs four times. He was the meekest of men who put his faith in the Great God, that God might have all the glory:

He was the son of a slave; he was the child of a princess.

He was born in bondage; he lived in a palace.

He was laid by the river; he appeared on the mountain.

He dwelt in the desert; he built a sanctuary for God.

He fled in fear; his face shone in glory.

He kept sheep; he led a nation.

He was hid 3 months; he walked 40 years.

He had the wealth of a king; he suffered affliction.

He refused the treasures of Egypt; he bore the reproach of Christ.

He forsook Egypt, he saw the Invisible.

Moses the Babe

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s

commandment" (Hebrews 11:23). In this first reference in Hebrews chapter 11 to the faith of his parents, we are introduced to that which marked Moses throughout his life:

We need to see that Moses was the hidden man: He was hidden by his parents for three months in the home.

He was hidden in the ark of bulrushes by the brink of the river.

He was hidden in the wilderness for forty years.

He was hidden on Mount Sinai for forty days.

He was hidden on the Mount a second time, alone with God.

He was hidden in the cleft of the rock by the hand of God.

He was hidden upon Mount Nebo where God buried him.

We are only allowed brief glimpses of the most noble of God's servants when they appear in public service. The greater portion of their lives is not revealed to us as it was spent in private communion with God. The great example is the Lord Himself. The ratio of time spent in private to that spent in public is approximately 10 to 1. There is great profit in studying His public life, His private life and His prayer life. "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). When the Lord taught the disciples to pray, He referred to: "Thy Father which seeth in secret" three times (Matthew 6:4,6,18). Moses communed with God, face to face. God spoke to him, mouth to mouth. The constant refrain in his writings was; "as the LORD commanded Moses".

"The king's commandment", to murder all the male children did not apply to Aaron, who was three years older than his brother Moses. This wicked decree was successfully outwitted by the shrewdness of the women in attendance and does not seem to have been prolonged. Stephen's statement; "In which time Moses was born" (Acts 7:20), indicates that Moses was born at the very time that the bitter bondage in Egypt was at its peak. In the fulness of Divine purposes God caused the future deliverer of His people to be born in a humble peasant home. Like his blessed Lord, Moses was born under sentence of death at the king's command. Moses' parents saw that he was, "a goodly child" and seemed to recognise the mark of God's favour. As with Joseph and Mary, Amran and Jochebed may have received Divine communication, or simply by faith, they refused the royal edict.

"She hid him three months" (Exodus 2:2). Moses was, "nourished up in his father's house three months" (Acts 7:20). He was "hid three months of his parents" (Hebrews 11:23). They raised him together, united in their concern, a godly couple guided and preserved by God to raise a great family. Aaron their eldest boy became the high priest, Miriam their daughter led the praise of all the women in the song unto the Lord at the Red Sea and Moses was raised up

to lead the people of God out of Egypt. Some reader of these pages may be a father who was never called to specific public service or a mother who has served God in her own sphere of godly silence and subjection. What an honour in present conditions to have the joy and privilege of rearing a family to honour God in society where marriage and family life are under such satanic attack.

In the formative years of Moses, God used five women, Jochebed, Miriam, Shiphrah, Puah and Pharaoh's daughter. God worked in the domestic sphere, the home life. The first to influence, the first to encourage, the beginning of great things for God may begin in a house of prayer and godly example, where it is the done thing for the whole family from earliest days, to go to the meetings and be taught the Scriptures which are able to make wise unto salvation, in Sunday School. Indeed, often the early training of a servant of God begins when he himself teaches a little Sunday School class and is encouraged to see God's hand in salvation.

Moses and the Bulrushes

An ark of bulrushes and the tears of a babe were vital links in God's plan to raise up a man to lead His people out of Egypt. When God's purpose was to call Moses to this great work, He placed Moses in the palace and allowed Pharaoh to feed him. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"She could no longer hide him" (Exodus 2:3). Moses' mother parted with him three times. She nursed him in the home, embraced him in her arms as long as she could. There came the day of her last kiss and she tenderly laid him in the ark of papyrus rushes and bitumen, closed the lid and laid it in the flags by the river's brink. She did not trust him to the buoyancy of the Nile but by faith, with sensible precautions she placed him in the care of God, for, "they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Hebrews 11:23). The place of death was the place where he lived, illustrating the principle of death and life in the believers experience expressed in baptism and being raised up from the dead, "so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

"Behold, the babe wept" (Exodus 2:6). To deliver His people, God used the cry of a babe to move the power of the nation. The lesson is that we must trust God, right up to the line. This was also the lesson that Moses repeated at the impassable waters of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:13). Peter slept, chained between two soldiers, as Herod planned his execution for the next day (Acts 12:6). Gallows had been constructed by Haman fifty cubits high to hang Mordecai in the morning (Esther 5:14). "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

One of the residences of the Pharaoh's was at the estuary, near the sea where there was less danger of crocodiles. Moses' mother placed the little ark among the reeds, not midstream, so it would not float away. This area was commonly frequented by members of the royal court. Pharaoh's daughter would have been suspicious of a Hebrew woman but the presence of a child, was an act of wisdom and overruled by Divine design so that he was returned to his mother who; "took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew" (Exodus 2:9-10). She had him when he was growing while under royal protection and she was receiving wages. We read, "when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren" (Exodus 2:11). Who taught Moses that those people serving in bitterness with vigour and hard bondage, working in mortar and brick, were his brethren? His mother taught him that this nation of slaves were God's people. The lesson is, never criticize God's people before your family. Moses' mother had him growing up, in a God fearing home in those early formative years. This was no accident or happy coincidence but the overruling hand of God that Moses would be taught those vital convictions essential for the future deliverer of Israel. Dear mother, rear that boy for the Lord. Do not, for material gain, give him out to someone else to rear for you. In school days guide him from the Scriptures. In college years order and supervise his company before he leaves the shelter of the home. God gave the precious opportunity to Moses in those first personal irretrievable years to be under the godly influence of prayer and faith.

"She brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son" (Exod. 2:10). It was another distressing occasion when Moses' mother, with her last words, final advice and parting kiss, delivered him up to enter the palace.

Moses and His Brethren

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Hebrews 11:24). Historians suggest that this lady was Thermutis who was married but childless. "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). Moses obtained the best education as a prince in the most advanced nation on earth at that time. He would have learned arithmetic, the Egyptians left detailed land markings of the annual inundations of the Nile; astronomy, the pyramids of Egypt were built in exact orientation to the sun in years of 365 days; art, the excellence of which is still preserved; architecture of massive proportions; anatomy, medicine, dentistry preserved in the teeth of the mummies; amusements, "pleasures of sin" associated with Egyptian idolatry, athletics, sports and music of ancient Egyptian culture. The extreme dryness of the Egyptian atmosphere has preserved in almost perfect condition, the inscriptions of the early civilization. "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy

the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). To obey the call of God is costly. A choice must be made before God. Moses never forgot that his parents were slaves, his brethren were groaning. Like Ruth, he would say; "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). He belonged to an alien race who were treated with suspicion and hate in Egypt. His brethren were an oppressed people, under a cruel lash. They were living in savage enslavement, building cities for Pharaoh. "He went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens" (Exodus 2:11).

"Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Hebrews 11:26). Some believers speak about providential guidance in their service and read the will of God into the circumstances in which they find themselves. Moses was in circumstances in Pharaoh's palace where he could have helped the people of God. Perhaps he could try to influence Egyptian politics or send money or food to ease their burden. He had the opportunity to ride in chariots of grandeur or float on the Nile in a golden barge listening to nice Egyptian music. 'Accounting the reproach of Christ' was a decisive act once for all. Moses wrote about Christ as the coming Messiah 1500 years before Christ came, "Until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Genesis 49:10).

In the wilderness they, "were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:2-4). This N.T. passage taken from the O.T. background, asserts that Moses was focused upon the Person of Christ as the recompense of the reward of faith yet future. Hebrews chapter 11 speaks of Moses parents not fearing the "king's commandment" (v23); and Moses himself, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (v27). Moses led the people by faith, out of Egypt not fearing the waters of the Red Sea, nor the pursuing chariots of Pharaoh or the strength of the walls of Jericho (Heb. 11:29-30). The key to the choice that Moses made was that, "He endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible (the unseen One)" (Hebrews 11:27). Faith steps out when it has nothing visible to tread on. Faith is prepared to give up what it cannot keep to gain what it cannot lose.

Moses' choice (responsibility) was made before he got a definitive call (sovereignty) from God. A choice is not made by one who has nothing to give up. Service is worth nothing if it costs nothing. Paul said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). A man should be at no material advantage by going out full time in the work of the Lord. This was the first decisive step of Moses on to the ladder of faith leading to Horeb, Sinai, Pisgah, the Mount of Transfiguration and Heaven. Moses knew God face to face.

(Continued)