

Judges 8: 22-27
Judges 15: 11
Judges 17, 18

Self-Judgment in the House of the Lord

We as believers have a great deal of work to do regarding this world, only a small part of which involves actively changing it. That's more the job of the Holy Spirit. What is more important to the task ahead of us, as members of the Body of Christ, is in getting the world out of *us* (which takes an equal amount of work by the Spirit as we *surrender* – uh-huh, *that word* again – to Him). Focusing our vision, our thoughts and our desires on the Kingdom of God – for which we will be citizens far longer than we will be citizens of this or any other nation – is perhaps the most important task ahead of us and one that is key to most anything else in the work of the Kingdom. Because when our focus shifts back to the things of the world instead of the things of the Spirit, our effectiveness for the Kingdom is lost.

How do I know? Simple – we have the record of the Book of Judges as an example of what happened to ancient Israel when the same thing occurred. And while believers can still work for the Kingdom and call on the Lord to rescue America from the crisis we are headed toward, it must be asked: What happens *after* that?

God had warned the people through Moses that their hearts were still inclined toward turning away from Him and serving other gods, even the “heroic generation,” the children of those who came out of Egypt, who entered Canaan and took possession of the land He promised to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And while that generation served the Lord faithfully, it wasn't long before their children started to look toward the Baals, Molech and the false gods of the region. Thus began a period of spiritual and cultural degradation for Israel which saw her swing from independence to domination by her neighbors and what remained of the nations she was supposed to drive out because of *their* sins in the land.

In a sense, what happened with ancient Israel is a little like what has been referred to as “yo-yo dieting.” A person crash diets until they reach their weight target, then immediately goes back to the bad eating habits that made them gain weight in the first place. When their weight goes up again, it's back on the crash diet (which was probably not good for them in the first place), and it's up/down, up/down, etc. until the body suffers from poor nutrition or some related condition. The key with any diet is to *stay with it* and make it a lifestyle, not just a tool to be used when we've hit the ice cream a little too hard.

So it is with the things of the Lord. Okay, we don't have Baal and Molech *per se* hanging around any more, but we do have their spiritual descendents ever with us as rivals to the Lord, often triggered by our own selfishness and besetting sins. The matter is further complicated by our national prosperity and abundance; in some cases, excess. Because we as Americans for the most part have not known true poverty (on the scale of, say, the Great Depression) for the last three or four generations, many believers have no idea of what it's like to truly depend on the Lord, to “throw in” completely with Him and place all of our trust in Him, even though the Lord has warned us to prepare for hard times ahead. As a result, it's far too easy for us to look back at what we're supposed to be

leaving behind, and it's always *right there*, ready for us to indulge. As a result, our spiritual life suffers and we pick up some pretty strange ideas about the Lord, the One True and Living God.

As the period of the Judges of Israel began, repentance by the nation was genuine and the nation would rally behind whoever God had raised up to deliver Israel. Following such deliverance, it was often several generations before the nation backslid into idol worship resumed. But as the cycle of sin/repentance continued, the period of restoration grew shorter. In the case of Gideon, no sooner had the judge who, led by the Lord, saved Israel passed away than the nation went right back into sin. And even before Gideon died, an ephod he had made from the plunder of the Midianites had been turned by the Israelite people into – you guessed it – and idol.

Because Israel had not dealt once and for all with its tendency toward idol worship, the poison of that sin worked its way into the minds of the people until Israel lost its sense of being the people of God, His treasured possession. The One True and Living God became “one among many,” as it were. He had been demoted from the Lord their God, King and Creator of the Universe (before Whom all others are false and pretenders), to merely Israel's “national god,” on the same level as the Baals, Ashtoreths, Dagon, Molech, *et al.* As this spiritual and cultural poisoning took effect, we could see its results in two major ways:

1. **Hedging their Bets:** In Judges 15, we have the account of Samson, who was born for the purpose of beginning Israel's deliverance from the Philistines. He was to be a Nazarite from birth, to keep the conditions of the vow of separation all his life. Samson's problem, however, was that he was *too* separate – in all his life he never once tried to rally the nation to follow him, but was a one-man show performing feats of strength, albeit under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Judges never records him building an altar to the Lord or offering any kind of sacrifice, except for his own life at the end. And, apparently, the Israelites were happy to keep it that way since no one *else* tried to rally the nation behind Samson, either. Of course, the reason for their hesitation could also be that, morally, Samson was not separate *enough*, continually going for Philistine women. The toxin of idol worship which led to the view of the Lord merely as the “national god” had taken enough of a hold that the people were content to wait for the outcome of the showdown. *Whose god would prevail – ours or theirs? We'll see who wins... and follow that one.*
2. **Manipulation of God:** As God as demoted to “one among many,” the attitude of His people toward Him changed. Since the Lord was now on the same level as the other national deities, this logic reached the eventual conclusion that He could be manipulated – just like the others. Make a reasonably extravagant sacrifice, put a little “English” on the prayers, and He'll give you whatever you want. The end results of this can be found in Chapters 17 and 18 of Judges, in the account of Micah, his mother, and a Levite who becomes priest, first of Micah's house, then of a town of Danites. In the hope of getting the Lord's blessing, Micah's mother dedicates an amount of silver (recently returned by her son after he “fessed up” to stealing it) to the Lord... in the form of a cast idol. Micah sets up a shrine with it, which soon is led by a Levite looking for a place to live. Micah's view is that the Lord will be good to him, since a Levite has become priest of his little shrine –

never mind that God specifically prohibited idol worship, the Levites from serving any god but Himself, and had said that the tabernacle of God was to be set up in one location (at the time, Shiloh), where all Israel was to come to and bring sacrifices for the Lord's festivals. The distorted view of worshipping God was not just confined to Micah and his family; a group of Danites apparently held similar ideas, as they decided to confiscate the shrine, the idol and the Levite on their way to setting up a town for themselves, persuading the Levite to join them through appealing to his ego: *Dude – how'd ya like to be the priest of a whole town, rather than just this one family?* Even Elijah the prophet directly asked the people, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God then follow him." (1 Kings 18: 21)

The last line of the Book of Judges is, perhaps, the most telling: *In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit* (Judges 21: 25). Israel was originally meant to be what could be called a Direct Theocracy; God Himself was to be their king. Since He alone was the True and Living God, He alone was to be worshipped, and His laws followed wholeheartedly – He was not to be thrown a bone every so often. Ancient Israel let this fact slip by them, and the nation paid the consequences, which God Himself had spelled out in the curses for disobedience in the Book of Deuteronomy. Eventually, their sin led to the loss of nearly complete freedom under God and the installation of a human king in the hope of bringing order out of the chaos of everyday life and the threat from Israel's neighbors. This was fine, as long as the king was Godly, but when the king was not Godly, conditions were intolerable. And even Godly kings like Solomon laid such a heavy burden on the people that they cried out for relief (refer to 1 Kings 12).

America, at the very least, was founded by Godly people – not atheists or agnostics, nor Deists as modern scholars so desperately try to paint them. The last two or three generations, however, have seen this nation turn away from its Godly heritage, for which America is beginning to pay its consequences in the form of national humiliation, loss of prestige, the rising of enemies to harass the people and judgment on their new "gods." The words of the Founding Fathers all point to America's system of government as one designed for people who could largely govern themselves, under the restraint of piety, but now piety is looked upon as a vice rather than a virtue. And the government now looks to take more power for itself from the people who rightfully should wield it in the name of social justice. Must it come to this? Have the American people wandered so far away from God that they can no longer be counted upon to govern themselves and now require a heavier hand of government upon them to maintain order?

Since America has served a purpose in the Kingdom, and since there are still many people praying for Revival in the nation, I do not believe that God is going to just let this nation go wandering off. He will restore us to the principles upon which the nation was founded. But after a handful of "me generations" – even among believers – steeped in the philosophy of self-improvement, "if it feels good, do it" and entertainment that appeals to our own various lusts, I cannot help but wonder how long it's going to take for full restoration to occur. Will it take place in one generation? Or, like the Israelites, will it take a second generation, which finally has enough of self purged from their hearts and minds, to re-enter God's full blessings? Are we able to judge ourselves

and target those things in us that need removal, or do conditions have to get to the point where God has to do it? Because the job *will* get done, one way or another.

The extent to which Revival will spread is directly related to how much we are willing to surrender to God and recognize Him *as* God – King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Creator and Sustainer of the universe. And He is willing to help us get rid of what we cannot in our own strength in order for us to reach that goal. But are we willing to take the first steps back toward Him in order for this to happen?

For the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ
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