



## ISRAEL'S THIRD APOSTASY

**Lesson Aim:** To emphasize the utter failure of Israel to meet the divine standard under the covenant of law, and the persistent grace of God manifested in every test and subsequent failure.

**L8. Text:** Judges 4:1-9, 16-22. **Date:** May 1959.

**Topic:** Apostasy: Of Israel; Deborah; Sin: Deliverance from.

It is difficult to understand human nature. When once a people had suffered because of rebellion and disobedience, it seems they would be so careful to follow God's law. Such is not the case, however, either for Israel or for us. The history of the book of *Judges* is a repetition of apostasy, oppression, repentance and deliverance. Today's lesson shows the same story over again. For the third time Israel turns from God and for the third time she suffers under the oppressor's heel. This time the oppression lasted twenty years before God raised up a deliverer.

When will men learn that sin is not worth what it costs? Israel turned to other gods and as a result lost her dependence as well as having to pay heavy tribute and suffer much persecution. When delivered, it only took the next generation to turn to sin again. Let us not condemn Israel without remembering our own oft backslidings. The modern Christian will neglect the Bible, the church, prayer and Christian service, knowing all the time that he is cutting himself off from the smile of God's approval thereby. Often he goes on in sin until the severe discipline of God is needed to call him back. How we all need to learn that God does not excuse sin in any person at any time. Sin must be quickly reported of and forgiveness sought or suffering is sure to result. The seemingly easy method by which we can find forgiveness should encourage no one to look lightly upon sin. It is open insult against a righteous God. Let us flee from it as from a deadly danger. No one loves God and practices sin, I John 3:4-10.

EXPOSITION

## I. Man Utterly Fails to Meet the Divine Standard, 4:1-3.

1. Man fails in spite of good examples before him, verse 1. Observe that the apostasy took place after Ehud was dead. He was the judge who delivered the nation from the Moabites and this note clearly acquits him of any responsibility in its lapse back into evil. Shamgar had likewise delivered them from the Philistines (Judges 3:31) as Othniel had delivered them from the Mesopotamians (3:5-11). The folklore of the nation had preserved the work of these leaders so that men knew of the former oppressions and deliverances. They had sufficient evidence of the type of man God approved and were challenged thereby to such holiness. In spite of this example, they failed to remember God.

Read Hebrews, chapter eleven, and see the heroes of faith listed there. See in verses thirty-three to thirty-nine the great victories gained by their faith in God. Now look at chapter twelve, verse one, and read how these great men and women of faith challenge us to a like life. They are witnesses who look at us to see what manner of life we are living and how we are waging the battle. If Israel is unexcused for her sins, how much less will you and I be excused! We have the entire Scriptures (Israel had only a small portion of the Old Testament), the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and the example of all the faithful who have lived in the generations past. What a challenge!

2. Man fails in spite of full knowledge that sin brings judgment, verse 2. Former experiences, such as that of Ai and the former judges, was ample evidence that sin would get its just punishment. The Lord “sold them” (that is, “gave them over”) into the hands of Jabin, king of Canaan. Jabin (probably meaning “intelligent”) was a common name for the kings of Hazor, such as Abimelech was among the Philistines and Pharaoh was among the Egyptians. Joshua met and defeated a Jabin, king of Hazor, in the conquest of the land. Israel had failed to drive the Canaanites out of the land as the Lord had commanded (Joshua 23:4-13) and now they had increased in strength sufficient to suppress Israel. This is the judgment which had been threatened. Again we see that it does not pay to disobey God.

The coming of Christ does not lessen the judgment on sin. In fact, it increases it. In the light of God’s revelation in Christ Jesus, sin becomes more serious. The greater the light of God the more terrible sin looks, Romans 7:13. For the Christian, sin means blessings withheld and communion with God broken. For the unbeliever, sin increases the sufferings to be experienced in hell.

3. Man fails in spite of deep regrets over former sin, verse 3. Sorrow over sin is not a sufficient guarantee that one will keep free from sin. This writer had the experience of working with an alcoholic who would weep over his sin and admit it was breaking up his home, but who would not give up his habit. Israel had wept over sin before (Judges 3:9, 15), but they are now involved again. We must remember that there are two types of sorrow for sin, II Corinthians 7:8-10. One is sorrow because sin is seen as an insult against a holy God. It detests sin because of its very nature. This is “godly sorrow” and works a true repentance (turning from sin). The other is more a sorrow that one was caught and must face the consequences. It sorrows because of personal suffering involved and not because of sin’s nature. It is a “sorrow of the world” and works death. Someone has truly said, “Repentance is more than a tearful cheek-washing between sinful binges!” The sorrow which does not lead to a desertion of sin is not the kind of sorrow that God prompts and that leads to God-honoring repentance.

4. Man often fails because of the power of the adversary, verse 3. The Canaanites who were left in the land had increased to great military might. Their presence and strength would naturally make many people of Israel turn to their gods. The very impressiveness of the enemy would cause many faint-hearted to make alliances with them rather than trust in Jehovah.

Many weak-kneed Christians are associating with the devil’s crowd for the same reason. Desiring to be popular and “one of the crowd,” many Christians sell their peculiar identity for the mess of pottage of fair-weather friends. They forget that there is a reality which cannot be seen. There is a Friend who sticks closer than a brother, Proverbs 18:24. How much a man loses when he puts the Lord in a secondary place because of the desire for man’s approval!

## II. God’s Grace Provides the Remedy for Sin, 4:4-24.

1. God’s remedy is given at the opportune time. It is wonderful how God always acts at the proper time. It is because in His infinite wisdom, He knows what is best in every event. Look back upon sacred history and see how God has brought all things, political, social, economical and religious to work in His great design and to accomplish His will. In the case of the judges, God raises them up at the time of Israel’s repentance.

When Paul looks upon the coming of Christ he sees it was “in the fullness of time,” Galatians 4:4-6. The circumstances of the whole world were such that it was ready for His appearing. The prevalence of evil or the strength of the enemy is of no difference to God. When the time for the

performing of His will comes, it will be performed. We may fear His promises will go unfulfilled, but such is not the case. God is faithful and will never forsake His own. We lay our case before God and leave the matter to his wisdom and His work in His own good time.

2. God's remedy arises from an unexpected source, verses 4-5. It is a surprise to find a woman acting as judge in Israel. Up to this time the Bible has had comparatively little to say about women, and they seldom appear as leaders among the people. Here is a woman, however, who held the position of political and religious leadership. (Thank God for women who are willing to follow His will and take the place of leadership when men will not do so.) Deborah, the judge, not only judges Israel, she also goes into battle with the doubting Barak. What a testimony for the power of a woman's faith.

God's greatest remedy for sin came in the person of Jesus. Do you remember the response of Nathanael when he heard Jesus was from Nazareth? "*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*" John 1:46. Perhaps many others wondered the same. Who would have expected the Messiah to arise from a peasant family who was living in the wicked city of Nazareth? From the tiny land of Palestine and the comparatively small nation of the Jews has come God's greatest gift to man. Unexpected by men but real just the same.

3. God's remedy is effective only as man cooperates. Deborah called for Barak to come to her from Kadesh-naphtali. She gives him information concerning the raising of any army and the provisions for the battle. Barak is afraid to go unless Deborah goes with him, probably because he feels her presence will assure the Lord's help in the coming battle. The battle is engaged and Israel's army wins. Observe that God commands Deborah to call Barak for the battle. God strengthens the army of Barak that he might win over the pagan Sisera. Yet, observe likewise that God had seemingly made no move to deliver Israel except through the people themselves. This is simply to say that God's remedy is effective only as man cooperates with the purpose of God.

This principle is true in our day—even in the spiritual realm. It is true that Jesus died for all men, I John 2:2. Yet, all men are not saved. Why? Because God saves men only as they are willing to allow Him to do so. Look through the Bible and see how many times God has limited Himself to use of human instruments to perform His will. Observe how many invitations He gives for men to open their heart to Him and let Him in. So far as an individual sinner is concerned, Jesus has died in vain unless he is willing to exercise faith and allow Him to grant forgiveness of sins. God waits for man to let Him work.

4. God's remedy is ultimately the work of God alone, verse 15. To say God works through human instrumentality and that God waits for man's response is not to limit the work of God. Whatever victory is won and whatever sin is forgiven, it is still God's power which accomplishes it. "*The Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak,*" verse 15. Josephus quotes an old tradition that the Lord sent a sudden hailstorm with strong wind. It makes the army of Sisera unable to fight while it did not harm the Hebrews, coming from behind their backs. It matters little whether God used a storm or just gave superior ability to the Hebrew army. When the battle was won they could not say, "We won the victory of Sisera." Instead, they must say, "The Lord gave us the victory."

Paul sees this as a universal principle in any dispensation. He observes that God gives us the victory through Jesus Christ, I Corinthians 15:57. We would readily agree that any man is defeated if he does not have God with him. Let the man who reads this take note of his own life. What place does God have in your business, your home, or our personal life? One is a success in life only as he lives in fellowship with God. Otherwise, even if he amasses a fortune, he is a failure in that which is most important—things of the Spirit.

## QUESTIONS

1. What influence should the lives of righteous men have upon us?
2. Identify: Deborah, Barak, Jabin, Sisera, and Jael.
3. How would you define "repentance"?
4. What evidence do we have of the military strength of Jabin?
5. Why did Barak want Deborah to go to battle with him?