
The Messenger



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

A Weekly Publication of the Christians Meeting at
2291 Highway Z, Wentzville, Missouri
westlakechurchofchrist.org

Dedicated to the Proclamation of the Truth in the Spirit of Love (Ephesians 4:15)

Volume 13, Issue 30

Evangelist and Editor:
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Aug. 12, 2012

Listen to PROVE ALL THINGS on 730 AM WKRE, Sunday mornings from 8:15 to 8:30

Every Man Became His Own Authority

by Bill Feist

Some people live by the philosophy that they do not discuss religion or politics. When you think about it, you can almost understand why this is so. Both subjects evoke some of the strongest emotions, convictions, and energies in people.

When the book of Judges comes to a close, we are introduced to a statement that centered on two of the main issues of Jewish life: religion and politics. The institution of the “judges,” however successful at times and in individuals, had failed in the eyes of the Jewish nation. It certainly had not given them external security. Judges 21:25 seems to look to the relatively near future when a hereditary monarchy seemed the only means of combining the tribes into one nation, putting an end to their mutual jealousies, and subordinating tribal interests to national interests. The seeds are being sown in Israel that the time had come, whether for war or peace, of a strong earthly hand wielding a central power for the common good. The book of Judges begins by relating the efforts of the various tribes to drive out the pockets of Canaanite resistance within the land. The major battles have been fought and the tribes have gone to their own allotments. God is Israel’s King and He has provided the nation with a law.

What lessons can we learn from this summation of the book of Judges?

First, we are impressed with the fact that Divine authority always exists whether we recognize it or not. Jehovah was Israel’s King and “Judge,” as such all authority resided in Him. When Israel came to Samuel with the request, “now make us a king to judge us like all the nations,” God declared such to be a virtual rejection of Him as king and judge of the nation. God declared this request of Israel to be a rejection of Him similar to that of their fathers when they forsook Him and served other gods (I Sam. 8:7-8). When they made this choice they became openly unfaithful to their calling and

renounced the principle that underlay their being a people for God's own possession. Such opens the door for every man to become his own authority.

Second, man is empowered by God to make choices. God created man as a free agent. This means that man has the ability to make choices. Joshua's challenge to Israel, "Choose you this day whom you will serve," (24:15) well illustrates such. Israel could choose to do what was right in the eyes of God or do what was right in their own eyes. There are instances in the book of Judges when they did both. However, Judges is full of illustrations of doing what was "right in their own eyes." When we choose the earthly over the heavenly; the material over the spiritual; the temporary over the permanent; we, like Israel, make a choice, but our choice reflects a rejection of the authority of our king. Man's free agency enables him to become his own authority.

Finally, consequences come to those who do things their own way. The book of Judges illustrates the failure of the tribes to drive out the Canaanites, thus allowing some of the worst traits of the Canaanites to make their mark in the character of far too many of God's people. Paul warns us that "evil companionships corrupt good morals" (I Cor. 15:33). Don't let the lesson seen in Israel be lost on us. Evil companionships gradually and progressively destroy morality. The destruction of one's moral standards is inevitable, if we maintain constant friendship with the wicked. When congregations of the Lord's people look to the denominational world around them instead of to the Lord and His word for authority, the end result is apostasy.

Viewing the statement of Judges 21:25 as simply a summation of the times discussed in the book of Judges: "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord" can readily be supported. A study of the following passages in the book indicates how Israel "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Each of these verses introduces a new situation in which Israel departed from God's way and sinned against the Lord. This notes a fundamental principle in man's dealings with God: Man is often dissatisfied with God's way and seeks to improve upon it. In doing such, man becomes his own authority.

Let every Christian remember that he is a servant of King Jesus. We must look to Him for all authority (Matt. 28:18) and to His word as the final standard of authority to settle every moral and religious issue in our lives (I Peter 4:11). The most important question we will ever have to settle in our life is: "Who is in charge: God or me?" Settle this issue and you will settle your eternal destiny.

News and Notes:

Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses.

"...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5:16