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## A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Judges 2:11-23

### 8. JUDGES

In 1745 Charles Edward Stuart suddenly appeared at Glenfinnan in the Scottish Highlands. He was a tall, good looking young man and an exciting dynamic leader. The heir of the Scottish kings and queens, Stuart had returned to Scotland to recapture the throne. George the second, the British king was an arrogant, cruel man who spoke only German, and the Scots hated him. The Highlanders loved their Prince Charles and committed themselves to follow him and dethrone the foreigner. At first they were successful in battle. But suddenly, *at the Battle of Culloden* their dreams came to an abrupt end. The Scots were crushed by the English army, and, although Charles escaped, his troops were slaughtered.

The Prince found his way to France to plan and dream about the day he would return and to take his ancestral throne. But he never did. In fact, to meet Charles twenty years later was to confront a tragedy. *He had become a hopeless alcoholic, his body and health broken.* His life had become a record of disgrace and shame, a long trial of broken marriages, discarded mistresses, and public scandals. His former friends wanted nothing to do with him. The Scots may still sing about their “*Bonnie Prince*

*Charlie,*” but there was little that was “*bonnie,*” about Charles at the end of his life. The life of Charles Stuart is the story of a great beginning followed by a tragic downward spiral into the slavery of sin. His life seemed to be one cycle of sin after another, taking him lower and lower and lower. You see, sin unchecked, in our lives has a way of doing that to us. It is possible to *begin brilliantly and end ignominiously.* Some believers are like the Russian satellite that went up on the back of a rocket, but came down like a rock and required a team of searchers in Northern Canada to find the fragments. My .... a good start does not assure a successful conclusion.

But this downward spiral of sin does not only operate in the lives of individuals. *Its also operates in groups and nations, and it's vividly illustrated for us in the nation of Israel during the period of the judges.* Here were a people who had experienced a great beginning as God worked mightily in their midst but as time went on, they moved further and further away from the Lord into the quicksand of sin. Eventually, they bore almost no resemblance to the people God had liberated from Egypt, kept in the desert and through Canaan in victory. Of course all the history in the book of judges is accurate history, but the arrangement is not based on chronology that is a sequence of events, instead it is presented in a repeated cycle of sin, oppression and delivery.

As we shall see, in Judges we round in circles or cycles but it's all in a downward spiral. My .... if ever a verse has the ring of the 21st century about its the one thats hanging at the backdoor of the book of Judges. “*In those days*

*there was no King in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*” ( 21:25 ) It doesn’t say that “ *every man did wrong,*” but, “ *every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*” Don’t miss this. Their own evaluation and estimation of their deeds was not that it was wrong, but right. However, it was right in their own eyes, not in the eyes of God. My .... is not why things are the way they are in our nation, our homes, our churches, and our lives ? It is right but in their own eyes. ***You see, our estimation of right compared to God’s estimation of right makes our right become wrong.*** For what is right in our eyes is not always what is right in God’s eyes. “ *In those days there was no King in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes,*” ( 21:25 ) The result was an age of Hebrew history blacker with moral pollution and darker with religious apostasy than almost any other age.

You see, Judges has been called one of the saddest books of the Bible. It records the story of a nation that had once known the wonderful works of God, a nation with a glorious history, but a nation that turned away from its grand heritage to reap a grim harvest. Now there are several things that I want you to notice by way of introduction to this book.

### **(1) The HISTORY of the Book:**

The second main group of books in our English Old Testament is called the historical books. Judges is the second of the twelve historical books, and it was written around 1000 BC. It was obviously written after Israel began to be ruled by a king for the key phrase of the book

says, “ *In those days there was no king in Israel,*” implying that there was a king when the history was published. ( 17:6 18:1 19:1 21:25 ) In addressing the Sanhedrin Stephen summarized this period, “ *And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years until Samuel the prophet.*” ( Acts 13:20 ) So the book of Judges takes us from Joshua’s conquest ( 1400 B.C. ) until Eli and Samuel judged prior to the establishment of the monarchy. Jewish tradition ascribes the authorship to Samuel. (1)

### **(2) The SUMMARY of the Book:**

The summary is given in ( 2:11 .... 2:23 ) Did you recall when you were a child ? Your parents would have taken you to the park and put you on a merry go round. That’s the best way to describe the book of Judges. For in this book we go round in circles. It’s the same cycle that’s repeated over, and over, and over again. Look at ( 2:13 ) There is SIN: ( 2:14 ) SUFFERING: ( 2:18 ) SUPPLICATION: ( 2:18 ) SALVATION: Look at the same cycle in ( Ch 3 ) ( 3:7 ) SIN: ( 3:8 ) SUFFERING: ( 3:9 ) SUPPLICATION: ( 3:10 ) SALVATION. Now that cycle is repeated at least 6 times in the book of Judges. Does it not reflect the lives of many people who don’t know the Lord ? They get up, go to work, come home, watch the television, and go to bed again, ready to repeat the same cycle the next day. It’s life on a large roundabout. You get nowhere and achieve nothing. So you have (1) (2) What about,

### **(3) The RELEVANCY of the Book:**

*“ Family feud leaves 69 brothers dead. Powerful Government leader caught in love nest. Gang rape leads to victim's death and dismemberment. Girls at party kidnapped and forced to marry strangers. Woman judge says travellers no longer safe on roads.”* Sensational headlines like that are usually found on the front pages of tabloids, but those headlines describe some of the events that occur in the book of Judges. Have we got murder today ? They had it in the period of the Judges. ( 9:1 ) Have we got rape today ? It happened in the Judges. ( 19:1 ) What about homosexuality ? Well, it was there also. ( 19:22 ) My .... this was a society without standards and a time without truth. *Well, how do you live in a society without fixed standards ?* When, everyone is doing that which is right in their own eyes, how do we believers keep on track ? Doing that which is right in the eyes of the Lord ? You see, book is so relevant because it provides us with living examples of people who faithfully served God in dark and ugly times. Did you know that when the writer of Hebrews listed Old Testament characters who walked by faith in their generation he mentioned the major judges.

Gideon, Barek, Samson, Jephthah. Now these men were not perfect, some of them committed grave sins, yet they were used by God and they challenge us with our limitations and failures to have an impact for righteousness in our society. Now there are three pictures in this book that I want you to see.

### **(1) A PICTURE OF TRIBAL APATHY**

For it's the tribes that are brought before us in this opening chapter. Nine and a half tribes which settled in Canaan did not destroy or even drive out the Canaanite nations as God had commanded. There was failure through compromise and every page of the book of Judges drives home this central truth. All of Israel's failure was due to compromise. As Dr. S. Baxter says,

**Incomplete mastery of an evil at the outset always means constant trouble from it afterwards, and often defeat by it in the end.**

So it was for Israel. So it is with us. My .... there is no use taking hold of a nettle with a tender hand. Israel failed through compromise and lived to rue it. You see, what need to remember is that although Israel had conquered the whole land of Canaan in a general sense, ( Joshua Ch's 13-22 ) there still remained pockets of enemy heathen nations here and there. When Joshua was an old man the Lord said to him, “ *there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.* ” ( Jos 13:1 ) Joshua failed to complete mopping up operations. Pockets of paganism remained dotted here and there, holding remnants of the Canaanites. The tribes of Israel owned all the land, but they did not possess all of it, therefore they could not enjoy all of it. What *a picture of tribal apathy*, is set before us in these opening chapters. Indeed Israel failed on three counts.

#### ***(a) They Failed to CONQUER THE LAND:***

For while these opening verses record the early victories

of Judah and Simeon, the rest of the chapter is a record of repeated defeats. Did you notice that time and again the Lord keeps pounding out the message ? “ *They did not drive them out.* ” ( 1:27,28,29,30,31,32, 33 ) Now is this what God told them to do ? No ! ( Deut 7:1-6 ) Now why were Israel to drive them out ? “ *Lest they make thee sin against Me,* ” saith the Lord. ( Ex 23:33 ) Is that not exactly what happened ? The nations in the Land of Canaan became **Thorns** ( 2:3 ) that afflicted Israel and **Traps** that ensnared Israel. You see, the Jews eventually became so accustomed to the sinful ways of their pagan neighbours that those ways didn't seem sinful any more. ( 2:11-13 ) Then they became interested in how their neighbours worshipped, until finally Israel started to live like their enemies and imitate their ways. **The Thorns had become Traps.** I can just hear the Israelites rationalize their behaviour by saying, “ *These people don't seem that bad. They look harmless. They appear to be fine people who have been given a bad press. We don't want to be mean, cruel, or unkind, so, we'll see if we just can't all get along.* ”

My .... don't we do the same thing ? Don't we, at **times**, settle for less than complete victory in our lives over sins and bad habits ? And while we seek to make justification, rationalization, and accommodation for these things, the “ *little foxes,* ” come in and “ *spoil the vine.* ” ( S of S 2: 15 ) You see, for believers to day, the first step away from the Lord is “ *friendship with the world,* ” ( James 4:4 ) which then leads to our “ *being spotted by the world.* ” ( 1:27 ) The next step is to “ *love the world,* ” ( 1 Jn 2:15 ) and gradually become “ *conformed to this*

*world,* ” ( Rom 12:2 ) This can lead to being “ *condemned with the world,* ” ( 1 Cor 11:32 ) the kind of judgment that came to Lot ( Gen Ch 19 ) Samson ( Jud Ch 16 ) and Saul ( Ch 15, 31 ) My .... have the thorns become traps in your life personally ? Things that you have allowed to remain in your life are now bringing you into bondage. I think of believers who have entered into marriage with unbelieving partners and today they are nowhere spiritually. If you had asked them at the time of their courtship they would have said, “ *you have no call to worry, this is purely platonic, its harmless.* ” But that little thorn grew, until it entrapped them. My .... the thorns so easily become traps personally and corporately. H. Bonar once said, “ *I looked for the church and found it in the world and I looked for the world and found it in the church.* ” My .... we need to beware of falling standards. Sometimes I hear Christians say, “ *I don't care what way they come to the meetings as long as they come.* ”

Is that how God feels about His people ? I'm not talking here about how the unsaved. Get them in whatever way you can. But does God have standards for His people ? Yes. What a responsibility we as parents have, to bring up our children in the light of the Word of God, not in the light of the ways of the world. (a)

### **(b) They Failed to CONSIDER THE LAW:**

This was the reason for their failure and defeat. You see, God promised Joshua constant victory and success if he honoured the book. ( Jos 1:7-8 ) And Joshua repeated this promise to the nation ere he took his leave of them.

( 23:5-11 ) He said, “ *Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left. That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you .....*,” But do you see what happened in Judges ? ( 2:2 ) ***What was Central in Joshua became Peripheral in Judges.*** My .... is God's Word central in your life ? Someone has said, “ *The Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't.* ” Did you notice one of the tragic results of neglecting God's Word in ( 2:10 ) ? They had not even won their own children to the Lord. They had failed to teach them the Word of God as God had instructed them. ( Deut 6:1 ) How often that happens in nations, in families, in churches, how easy it is for the younger generation to fall away from the Lord if the older generation is not faithful to teach them. My .... the Word of God must be Central in our churches, in our homes, in our lives. Yes, they failed, (a) (b)

### ***(c) They Failed to CLEAVE TO THE LORD:***

Look at ( 3:7 2:11-13 ) The Hebrew text is far more strongly worded. “ *The children of Israel did the evil.* ” They threw themselves into the supreme sin, the sin of all sin. Look at ( 2:13 ) Now Baal and Ashtaroth were false deities in the Canaanite pantheon of gods. Baal was the god of the storm and rain who rode on the clouds and was responsible for the crop watering rains. Astaroth Baal's consort was the goddess of war and fertility. Now in Canaanite religion the fertility of the land depended on the sexual relationship between Baal and his partner. In other

words the sexual union of these gods in the heavens was to result in an abundant harvest. But you see, the Canaanite faithful did not sit back and say, “ *Let Baal do it.* ” No. Instead their watchword was, “ *Serve Baal with gladness all ye glands.* ” They practised sacred prostitution as part of their worship. A Canaanite man would go for example to a Baal shrine and have sexual intercourse with one of the sacred prostitutes serving there. The man would fulfil Baal's role, the woman would fulfil Ashtaroth's. The idea, you see, was to encourage Mr. and Mrs. Baal to do their thing, thus the rain, grain and wine would flow again. My .... can you see why the Israelites were drawn toward Baal worship ? Do you see why God wanted His people to drive them out ? ( Deut 20:16 ) That they might be protected from contamination. ( Deut 18:9-12 ) But “ *they did not utterly drive them out.* ” ( 1:28 ) The result ?

They were overcome by them. Why ? There was no distinctive separation. Do you know something ? God's call to separation is for our preservation. “ *Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.* ” ( 2 Cor 6:17 ) Do you think that you can form deep relationships with the ungodly and not be effected spiritually ? Do you believe that you can frequent places where God is not welcome and it won't harm you ? Do we think that we can watch questionable films and it will not affect our daily walk with God ? Paul says, “ *Be not conformed to this world.* ” ( Rom 12:2 ) Or “ *Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould.* ” (1) The amazing thing is this. God loved Israel, that's why he raised up judges to deliver His sinful people and to call the nation back to Himself. So we have here not only (1)

## **(2) A PICTURE OF SUPERNATURAL ACTIVITY**

You see, Judges is the name given to these leaders God raised up to rule during these dark days. Look at ( 2:16-19 ) You can see that,

1. *God raised them up: they were divinely appointed;*
2. *God was with them: they were divinely empowered;*
3. *God worked through them: they were divinely used;*

Now these judges,

### ***(a) ARE DESIGNATED:***

They are appointed for a specific task. Consider,

#### **1. Their Role:**

The Hebrew word translated “*judge*,” means to “*to save, to rescue, to defend and to deliver.*” Now when we think of judges we think of the courthouse, dignified officials wearing stately robes, but these folk weren’t like that. Do you recall the old westerns ? Wyatt Earp and Matt Dillion, well the judges were probably more like them. They were like Western Sherrifs with forceful personalities. In ( 2:16 ) they are called “*deliverers*,” and that was often their function. God’s men for dark days. 1.

#### **2. Their Area:**

You see, these judges were not national but local leaders. When we read about Gideon and Samson we tend to think

that they were delivering the whole nation, but Israel was now divided into groups of tribes, spread over an area roughly the size of Wales. So when we read that a judge ruled for 40 years it may only apply to tribes in the north. Samson for example delivered the southern tribes and Gideon the northern tribes. 1, 2,

### **3. Their Number:**

Well, there is a division of opinion over that. Some say eight, some say twelve, and others say fourteen. I think what we can say is this. There are six major judges. And these six judges are identified with the six major apostasies of Israel. The six major apostasies are identified by these words, “*And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.*” ( 2:11 ) Thus the six major judges are Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. The six minor judges are Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. (a)

### ***(b) ARE DIFFERENT:***

If you were trying to find in the book of Judges a stereotype of the kind of person the Lord uses you would be confused. With tears streaming down her face, she looked at the pastor and said, “*I want more than anything else to make my life count for the Lord Jesus. When you were talking about what He has done for us and our position in Him, that really got through to me. But how can He use somebody like me ?*” Then she talked about Christians she respected and their qualities which she admired and envied. They inspired her, but they also

discouraged her because she lacked their personalities or gifts or talents. So how could the Lord have anything significant for her to do ? Have you ever thought like that ? “ ***How can God use someone like me ?*** ” Well, our God is God of infinite variety who uses people of all kinds, shapes and colours and He has a wonderful unique purpose for each of us. Nowhere is this seen more clearly as in the judges God used. I mean look very quickly at these six major judges.

### **1. Othniel was the Judge with a Glorious Heritage:**

Othniel had the privilege of belonging to a family that was led by an outstanding believer. Caleb was one of the two greatest men of his generation. It was God Himself who said, “ *Caleb hath followed me fully.* ” ( Num 14:24 ) Othniel name means “ *the lion of God,* ” and it was he who captured Kirjath-sepher ( 1:12-13 ) which means “ *The city of the Book.* ” As John Phillips reminds us we need Othniel’s today. Men who are living in victory, men who are lead to the church then the nation back to the Book, and to God’s great lion Jesus Christ. But young person, do you appreciate your heritage? 1.

### **2. Ehud was the Judge with a Physical Limitation:**

Look at ( 3:15 ) Or “ *a man handicapped in the right hand.* ” Its ironic that Ehud was from “ *Benjamin,* ” meaning “ *Son of my right hand,* ” ( 20:16 1 Chron 12:2 ) yet he was able to use only his left hand. A lefty from Benjamin. What an encouragement this is to people with physical disabilities who have the wrong idea that God

cannot use them in His service. Do you know the lifestory of Joni Eareckson ? As a young woman she became a quadriplegic in a diving accident. For years, Joni struggled with the terrifying fact that she would never again be able to walk or use her arms. Then, as God worked in her heart, she began to develop her skill. The Lord began to use her in a wonderful way to share His truth. When she accepted what she was, the Lord began to use her as she was. My .... have you an obvious handicap ? A defect ? Listen, accept your so called limitations and the Lord will open new areas of ministry.

### **3. Deborah was the Judge with Unusual Talents:**

While not a woman’s Libber Deborah was a liberating woman. Her name means “ *bee,* ” and accurately describes a busy, efficient, productive woman. Indeed just as a bee is capable of stinging its enemy so Deborah was God’s instrument who through Barak delivered a fatal sting to the enemies of Israel. I recall preaching on Deborah one time and a brother said to me, “ *I can’t believe God raised up a woman to be a leader in Israel at this time.* ” Do you know why God did it ? *There was no man willing to do it.* ( Is 3:12 ) Now we are living in a day when some women are wanting the place that Scripture has given to men. So today we have women ministers etc. But do you ever think about the men who remain silent and act like women ? How many brethren in the church there are whose voices are never raised in prayer, in worship and in ministry ?

#### **4. Gideon was the Judge with a Transformed Personality:**

Do you ever notice the first words on Gideon's lips ?  
“ *Oh, if, why, where, now.* ” ( 6:13 ) A little girl was listening to her mother tell some great stories about people like Moses, Joshua, Samson, and Daniel. Finally she turned to her mother and said, “ *Mummy you know God was much more exciting back then.* ” I think Gideon felt like that. He loved to hear what God had done for Israel in the past, but where were the miracles now ? Where was God now ? You see, Gideon is a man with an exercise, with a concern, with a heart for the people of God. Sure, he is frightened but he becomes fearless as the Lord says, “ *Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites have not I sent thee ?* ” ( 6:14 ) Its as though God has taken His might and put it inside Gideon so that Gideon is now full of the might of the Lord. I wonder are you like Gideon ? Fearful, hesitant, feeling inferior ? You see, one of the great truths of Scripture is that when God looks at us, He does not see us for what we are but for what we can become as He works in our lives.

#### **5. Jephthah was the Judge with a Needless Vow:**

Do you recall Harry Ironside's prayer ? “ *O God keep me from becoming a foolish old man.* ” It's good to start well, better to go on well, best to finish well. Now in many ways Jephthah was a man with many admirable qualities but he made a vow that was needless. Look at ( 11:30-31 ) Was Jephthah vowing to make a human sacrifice ? If he

was then it was doing something contrary to Scripture. ( Lev 18:21 20:2-5 Deut 12:31 18:10 ) Do you recall Moses instruction about vows ? “ *When thou shalt vow unto the Lord thy God thou shalt not slack to pay it for the Lord thy God shall surely require it of thee and it would be sin in thee.* ” ( Deut 23:21-23 Prov 20:25 Eccl 5:4-5 ) It was easy for Jephthah to make such a vow but he never thought that his only child would run out to meet him. How often do you make vows that you do no honour ? Have you been moved under the ministry of the Word and you say to the Lord, “ *I want to do this or that for your glory.* ” Has it ended there ? Have you been honest with God in this matter ? Have you said “ *I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back.* ” ( 11:35 )

#### **6. Samson was the Judge with a She Weakness:**

According to ( Heb 11:32 ) Samson was a man of faith, but he certainly wasn't a faithful man. He was not faithful to his parents teaching, his Nazarite vow or the laws of his God. He was a man of great potential and even greater tragedy because his life was a story of waste. ***Everything about Samson was exceptional.*** He was exceptional. He was exceptional in his birth, in his upbringing, in his unusual ministry of the Spirit, in his strength, in his victories, even in his defeat and downfall and in his final triumph. *But alas for Samson the man who could conquer his enemies could not conquer his lust.* You see, when it came to women Samson melted before his passions. He had three sad love affairs, his bride, ( 14:1, 7, 20 ) a prostitute, ( 16:1 ) and Delilah. ( 16:4 ) He was indeed the “ *He man with a she weakness.* ” Let me leave you with



one principle from Samson's life. Don't toy with temptation. When we toy with temptation it traps us. Do you recall Paul's words to young Timothy ? “ *Flee also youthful lusts.* ” ( 2 Tim 2:22 ) Samson chose not to flee and he lost his character, but Joseph not to stay and he maintained his testimony. ( Gen 39:7-12 ) My .... every time you are faced with lust. Flee, abandon ship. Ralph Emerson says, “ *Call on God but row away from the rocks.* ” Is that what you need to do ? Are there things in your life now that you need to deal with in a drastic way ? Are there areas in your life that need to be changed in you are going to preserve your character ? My .... don't toy with temptation, don't trifle with sin, don't play with fire.

***Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue  
Look ever to Jesus He will carry you through***

**(c) ARE DEFIANT:**

I mean they were different in so many ways, but they had one thing in common they dared to step out in faith for God. As Hudson Taylor looked over 30 years during which he had seen 600 missionaries respond to his vision to reach China, he said, “ *God does not do his work by large committees. He trains someone to be quiet enough, little enough, and then He uses him.* ” By that standard, which is God's standard all of us qualify. The issue is not whether He can or will use us. The great question is this, will you trust Him to do so ?

**(d) ARE DEPENDENT:**

Even Othniel with all his abilities and talents was successful only because of what the Holy Spirit did through him. ( 3:10 ) Do you recall Isaiah's words ? “ *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.* ” ( Is 40:31 ) God exchanges our weakness for His strength. So we have (1) (2)

**(3) A PICTURE OF NATIONAL ANARCHY**

It's interesting that the book of Judges starts with compromise and ends with corruption. At the beginning Israel are fighting the enemy, but by the end they are fighting each other. Initially they are under the rule of God ( Theocracy ) but by the end they are under the rule of nobody ( Anarchy ) ( 17:6 ) And this situation leads later to them wanting to be under the rule of a king. ( Monarchy ) In these closing chapters the emphasis changes from the enemy without to the cancer within. There is utter disregard of God's will, their own walk and other people's welfare. There is,

**(a) SPIRITUAL DISORDER:**

For chapters ( Ch 17-18 ) contain a corrupt man, mother, money, ministry and might.

**(b) MORAL DISORDER:**

For in ( Ch 19 ) there is brought before us an awful story of lust, homosexuality ( 19:22 ) and violence.

**(c) POLITICAL DISORDER:**

As inter-tribal warfare breaks out. So the book of Judges ends with those words, “ *In those days there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes.* ” ( 21:25 17:6 18:1 19:1 ) Today, there is no king in Israel, ( Lk 19:14 23:13-35 ) That’s why evil and lawlessness are rampant in this world, because the King has not come yet, but the fact that all is going so wrong down here, ( 2 Tim 3:1 ) is a sure sign of the nearness of His coming. You see, the only true remedy for the period of the Judges was the coming of the King, David who is mentioned in the next book of Ruth. As it was then, so it is now. My .... we are on the threshold of the glorious reign of the Coming of the King whose right it is to reign ! ( Jer 23:6 ) Listen, the King is Coming. “ *For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.* ” ( Rom 13:11 )

***Where is the promise, the signs all say  
His Coming is not far away  
Rejoice ye saints, He may come today  
He’s bound to come***

“ *Maranatha,* ” the Lord is coming. ( 1 Cor 16:22 )  
Are you ready ? “ ***Even so come, Lord Jesus.*** ”