

a sermon:

ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

II. THE STRUCTURE OF JUDGES

III. FROM THE VICTORY OF JOSHUA TO THE TURMOIL OF JUDGES

IV. THE LAMENTABLE NATURE OF ISRAEL IN THE TIME OF THE JUDGES

V. THE CALLING OF GIDEON AS A DELIVERER OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

VI. MAY WE NOT BE CONVICTED TODAY AS WAS ANCIENT ISRAEL?

VII. IN CONCLUSION

VIII. REFERENCES

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Scofield, the Old Testament Book of JUDGES covers about 305 years, from 1425 to 1406 BC. JUDGES “records seven apostasies, seven servitudes to seven heathen nations, seven deliverances.”¹ Following the death of Joshua and the incomplete conquering of The Promised Land, Israel fell into deep apostasy from The Covenant of Moses with JEHOVAH and into deep division among themselves. Through successive waves of such turmoil, Israel was oppressed by surrounding pagan nations and then delivered by Divine intervention through 13 judges, who then each ruled for a time over the nation.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF JUDGES

Howard sees 4 major sections of this Book: 1) “...a prologue indicating that the conquest described in JOSHUA was incomplete (1:1-2:5);” 2) “an introduction that summarizes the cycle of events that recur over and over again in the Book (2:6-36; esp. 2;10-23);” 3) “the core of the Book tells the stories of the individual Judges (3:7-16:31);” 4) the Book ends with two appendixes that portray the period as almost completely debased (17:1-21:25).”² The six major Judges were Othniel (3:7-11), Ehud (3:121-30), Deborah (4:1-5:31), Gideon (6:1-8:32), Jephthah (10:6-12:7) and Samson (13:1-16:31).

III. FROM THE VICTORY OF JOSHUA TO THE TURMOIL OF JUDGES

JUDGES is in sharp contrast to the preceding Book of JOSHUA. In JOSHUA, GOD’s Chosen People conquered most of The Promised Land under the leadership of the righteous Joshua. The Covenant of Moses was kept with The Almighty. Righteousness reigned. The people were as one in the service of GOD. The religious life of Israel was well served and guarded by the Priests of JEHOVAH under the guidance of The very Spirit of The LORD and in accordance with The holy Torah. Israel was well on its way to becoming a glory unto The LORD and a light unto the Gentiles – just as GOD had intended her to become. But suddenly we find ourselves in the turmoil of JUDGES! Howard observes of this Book that “it consists of a series of independent episodes, all

¹ 1, Scofield KJV, JUDGES, introduction, paragraph 2, page 287.

² 2, Howard, JUDGES, page 100, paragraph 3.

joined by a common motif of Israel's apostasy and GOD's faithfulness; the overall impression is one of near chaos in Israel's political and spiritual life, salvaged only by GOD's repeated intervention and provision!"³

Scofield observes that this time in ancient Israel's history was marked by 2 major repeating characteristics: "...the utter failure of Israel; the persistent grace of JEHOVAH."⁴ There is a verse that sums up The Almighty's persistent grace and delivery of His people, and yet also Israel's repeated breaking of The Covenant with GOD and straying over and over into the worship of false gods: JUDGES 2:16 records, "Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them."⁵ In spite of this, JUDGES 2:17 reports, "And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so."⁶

IV. THE LAMENTABLE NATURE OF ISRAEL IN THE TIME OF THE JUDGES

The most lamentable entry with which This Book ends is found in JUDGES 21:25: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."⁷ This verse tells us that, in spite of the repeated delivery of Israel by The hand of GOD, the people never seemed able to learn these simple lessons: that sin brings suffering, misery and death; that there is no god but JEHOVAH; that all men, but most especially Israel under The Old Covenant, are to worship The LORD and Him alone are they to serve! The sad story of Israel at this time records the nation constantly fighting against and suffering under pagan enemies within its Divinely prescribed borders that it should have long since eliminated; a continued giving in to by the people to the apostasy of worship of the false gods of the Canaanites around them; wicked and blood battle and betrayal amongst the people of Israel herself. As Howard observes, "the only positive

³ 2, Howard, JUDGES, page 99, paragraph 1.

⁴ 1, Scofield KJV, JUDGES, introduction, paragraph 1, page 287.

⁵ 3, Bible Works, KJV, JUDGES 2:16.

⁶ 3, Bible Works, KJV, JUDGES 2:17.

⁷ 3, Bible Works, KJV, JUDGES 21:25.

notes in the Book are GOD's constancy and the hints that things should get better under a new order" yet to come.⁸

What is the lesson to be taken from JUDGES? It is, as Howard puts it, "to show the consequences of disobedience to GOD and to point the way to a king, who, if he were righteous, would lead the people to GOD."⁹ In JOSHUA, we found Israel prospering under GOD's loving care because she obeyed her Covenant with Him. In JUDGES, we find a progressive breaking of The Covenant, disobedience to The Law and apostasy from worship of JEHOVAH only by Israel. The consequences are a spiraling down of ever deeper alienation from GOD, judgement upon the nation and suffering of the people. It is written in PSALM 33:12, "Blessed is the nation whose GOD is The LORD."¹⁰ If JOSHUA shows this Biblical Truth, JUDGES demonstrates that the opposite is just as true! And yet, The Almighty always reserves unto Himself to declare His will to men faithful servants who will serve in humility, faith and conviction. JUDGES gives us examples of many such men.

V. THE CALLING OF GIDEON AS A DELIVERER OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

Gideon The Judge is a stirring case of GOD working His will for His people through a humble servant. JUDGES records that The Almighty delivered the Israelites into the hands of the pagan Midionites because they had gone after the false gods of the land for 7 years, driving GOD's people into the hills and decimating their sustenance. And as we do even as Christians today, the Israelites cried out to GOD for deliverance. Therefore we read in JUDGES 6:12, "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."¹¹ We may find at least these 3 immediate lessons in Gideon's response to The LORD's commission to him: Gideon felt himself unworthy to serve GOD; Gideon feared that he would perish before GOD's holiness; Gideon doubted GOD and sought for a sign.

Firstly, he doubted himself as a worthy servant of The Almighty to deliver the oppressed people of GOD. For we read in JUDGES 6:15 that Gideon responded to The

⁸ 2, Howard, JUDGES, page 99, paragraph 3.

⁹ 2, Howard, JUDGES, page 101, paragraph 3.

¹⁰ 3, Bible Works, KJV, PSALM 33:12.

¹¹ 3, Bible Works, KJV, JUDGES 6:12.

Angel of The LORD, "...Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."¹² Wycliffe observes that "Israel's leaders uniformly exhibited a spirit of humility before GOD."¹³ This was so with Moses, with Isaiah and with Jeremiah, to name but a few. And so it was with Gideon. Therefore we read in PSALM 24:3-4, "Who shall ascend into the hill of The LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully!"¹⁴ If we are to be used of GOD to serve for his purposes, we must come before Him with humility.

Secondly, he doubted GOD's revelation that he would, in fact and with GOD's Hand, work this miracle, for he tempted The LORD for a sign. In JUDGES 6:17-18 Gideon asks for a sign to confirm that he was indeed in The Presence of The Almighty: "...If now I have found grace in Thy sight, then shew me a sign that Thou talkest with me!" And Gideon prepared food for the visitor, and placed them before The Visitor. For then we read in JUDGES 6:21 how GOD granted Gideon's request in this awesome wonder: "Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight!"¹⁵

Is it not natural for even the faithful Christian man to doubt? We have Moses and The Law. We have all the prophets. We have all the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by JESUS The CHRIST. We have the completed Revelation of Divine Scriptures. We have the testimony of all the saints of Israel and of The Church. We are in fact saved by the grace of The Son of GOD unto the promise of eternal life. We are even now part of His Body The Church on earth. The HOLY SPIRIT dwells now not merely among us, but within us! And yet, can we not feel Gideon's soul trembling with the question, "Has GOD really said this to me?" But with Gideon, we may still cry out as did Saint Thomas when he beheld the risen CHRIST, "My Lord and My GOD!"¹⁶ But what did The Saviour then declare? As in JOHN 20:29, "...JESUS saith unto him, Thomas, because

¹² 3, Bible Works, KJV, JUDGES 6:15.

¹³ 4, Wycliffe Commentary, JUGES 6:15, page 246.

¹⁴ 3, Bible Works, KJV, PSALM 24:3-4.

¹⁵ 3, Bible Works, KJV, JUDGES 6:21.

¹⁶ 3, Bible Works, KJV, JOHN 20:28.

thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!”¹⁷ Can we not cry out with Gideon, “O Lord JESUS, give us more faith, that we might believe, even if we do not see!”

Thirdly, he lamented that, because he had beheld GOD as a mere man, he feared in his humility that he would die! When Gideon realized that he in fact had seen GOD, he cried out in fear for his mortal life as in JUDGES 6:22, “...O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face!”¹⁸ Wycliffe observes that “Gideon was frightened because he had seen The (not an) Angel of The LORD!”¹⁹ O what a fearful thing it must be to stand before The King of The Universe, and not have one’s soul covered with Divine grace! But praise GOD for His grace to us, that under The Cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, we may indeed stand before The Almighty justified by The Blood of The Lamb of GOD! What Gideon saw only as a shadow, we may see if we will more clearly as in the words of Saint Paul in ROMANS 3:25-26: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [But we] Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God!”²⁰

VI. MAY WE NOT BE CONVICTED TODAY AS WAS ANCIENT ISRAEL?

But lest we as Christians are here tempted to wag our fingers at our Old Testament brethren of ancient Israel, the sin, apostasy and disunity found therein has solid and uncomfortable parallels to more than a little Church history down through the ages - perhaps even more so in our own modern Western nation today! Therefore Scofield comments on the state of Israel recorded in JUDGES, “The spiritual parallel is found in the history of the professing Church since the Apostles, in the rise of sects and the lost sense of the unity of the One Body...”²¹ Men look about today in America and cry out to The LORD and to one another, “Why do we suffer so in this enlightened modern age?” It is no great mystery that, the greater men drift from The Creator and His

¹⁷ 3, Bible Works, KJV, JOHN 20:29.

¹⁸ 3, Bible Works, KJV, JUDGES 6:22.

¹⁹ 4, Wycliffe Commentary, JUDGES 6:22, page 246.

²⁰ 3, Bible Works, KJV, ROMANS 3:23-25.

²¹ 1, Scofield KJV, JUDGES, introduction, paragraph 2, page 287.

Laws, the more sin abounds, and thus the greater the suffering. So Howard comments of the example of ancient Israel in JUDGES, “Repeatedly we see the Israelites breaking The Covenant, turning to the Canaanite gods, and generally “doing evil,” and repeatedly we see them suffering the consequences. The oppressions, chaos, and generally negative picture in the Book are due to the repeated sin.”²² This is cycle we may discern working in our own time and place today. Woe unto the nation that refuses to learn from such Biblical lessons, but glory to GOD for His blessings upon those that do!

VII. IN CONCLUSION

Were it not for GOD’s grace, would we not all be doomed to suffer the consequences of our sins? Just as The LORD corrected but spared ancient Israel from utter destruction for their sins, so He offers an even greater grace to His people in The Church today! Thanks be to GOD for His constant love and call to men to repent and live. Therefore let us hear the call of The Almighty to repent of our sins and live, as in EZEKIEL 33:11, “...As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”²³ Thus we may take comfort as in ROMANS 5:20-21, “...But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by JESUS CHRIST our Lord.”²⁴

²² 2, Howard, page 118, paragraph 4.

²³ 3, Bible Works, KJV, EZEKIEL 33:11.

²⁴ 3, Bible Works, KJV, ROMANS 5:20-21.

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