

an essay:

ON THE CHARACTER OF GOD EVIDENT IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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I. INTRODUCTION

There were 13 Judges proper - not including Joshua the successor of Moses, Eli the priest and the prophet Samuel - over ancient Israel before the establishment of the Israelite throne under the kings of undivided Israel. Within The Book of JUDGES, we find The Judges: Othniel [3:8-11]; Ehud [3:12-30]; Shamgar [3:31]; Deborah and Barak [4:1-5:31]; Gideon [6:1-9:57]; Tolah [10:1-2]; Jair [10:3-5]; Jephthah [11:1-12:7]; Ibzan [12:8-10]; Elan [12:11-12]; Abdon [12:13-15]; Samson [13:1-16:31].¹

The people of the Commonwealth of Israel repeatedly go through a cycle of sin and repentance in The Book of JUDGES, which is also a picture of the lives of most men of faith. First, the people's sins lead to suffering and oppression by pagan kings; second, the Israelites cry out to GOD for deliverance; third, GOD hears their cries and brings deliverance under succeeding Judges; fourth, the people then have rest and peace by The LORD's hand; fifth, they then fall into moral laxness and spiritual apostasy; and again, the people's sins leads to suffering and oppression. Each of these cycles reveals to us some of the aspects of GOD's character, which we shall briefly examine.

II. GOD IS FAITHFUL

PSALM 36:5 states, "Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds."² Though the ancient Israelites continue to sin and fall into idolatry over and over again, JUDGES records that GOD is faithful to His Covenant with His people. JUDGES 2:16 testifies, "Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them."³ Though men will often break their oaths of faith to The LORD, even in The Church today as was often the case in ancient Israel, The Almighty is steadfast, constant and unchanging.

¹ KJV, JUDGES, chapters 1-16 give us these Judges of pre-monarchy Israel: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Tolah, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elan, Abdon and Samson. Into I SAMUEL, the last two Judges of Israel before the crowning of Saul as king were the priest Eli and then the prophet Samuel.

² KJV, PSALM 36:5.

³ KJV, JUDGES 2:16.

Therefore when He enters into Covenant with us, His promises are sure and not subject to the changing whims and emotions of men. So Balaam declared by the power of The Holy Spirit in NUMBES 23:19, "GOD is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"⁴ So GOD was faithful to His Covenant with ancient Israel, and He is faithful to Christians by the Word and Sacrifice which He has given to redeem His saints in JESUS CHRIST! So we see that GOD is faithful.

III. GOD IS MERCIFUL

PSALM 145:8 declares, "The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy."⁵ Consider all the miracles which The King of The Universe had worked for the Israelites: He fulfilled His promise to Abraham, which He confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, to make of his seed a great nation to be His servant. He preserved them through centuries of hard bondage in Egypt. He delivered them from the lash of Pharaoh with great and mighty signs. He preserved them the people through forty years of wandering in the desert, never leaving them and always providing for them. He gave them His holy Law by His very hand through Moses. He gave them under Joshua The Promised Land as He promised. And still their hearts were not set upon The LORD.

Yet in spite of all these blessings and miracles, ancient Israel in the time of The Judges fell back into apostasy as soon as there was no Judge over them, and even before their Judges were dead! JUDGES 2:17 documents, "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 By human standards of mercy, one would have given up on Israel long ago! Fortunately for ancient Israel, as for those who by His mercy today are redeemed by The Body and Blood of The Saviour JESUS CHRIST, GOD alone is truly merciful! Indeed we see that GOD is merciful.

⁴ KJV, NUMBES 23:19.

⁵ KJV, PSALM 145:8.

IV. GOD IS LONGSUFFERING

Saint Paul declares in I TIMOTHY 1:15-16, "...that CHRIST JESUS came into the world to save sinners... Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first JESUS CHRIST might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."⁷ Though ancient Israel did not yet have The Cross to resort to, they had The Law. And though the standards of The Law are themselves not subject to negotiation in convicting men of sin, still The LORD Himself is longsuffering with men before He must apply the verdict of The Law against them. He calls us continually to repent, believe and be saved, which is to our great fortune, for otherwise no man would be spared! GOD's longsuffering is thus evident in JUDGES.

JUDGES 3:4 tells us that The LORD in fact allowed some of the pagan Canaanites to remain in The Land in order to prove His people's faithfulness to Him: "...to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto The Commandments of The LORD, which He commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses."⁸ Sadly, the Israelites intermarried with these heathen people and worshipped their false gods, contrary to The Covenant, doing evil in GOD's sight and even forgetting The LORD altogether! So here the pattern emerges, that when the children of Israel cried to The Almighty for deliverance, He raised up a Judge to rescue them and lead them back to Himself.

The first Judge we encounter is Othniel here in JUDGES 3, who as soon as he died, the Israelites again reverted back to their idolatry and were oppressed by the pagans about them, Yet GOD did not cast them away, but in His longsuffering allowed them to endure chastisement for a time, giving them ever more opportunities to repent and return to Him. Indeed GOD is longsuffering with sinners.

⁶ KJV, JUDGES 2:17.

⁷ KJV, I TIMOTHY 1:15-16.

V. GOD IS JUST

DEUTERONOMY 32:4 tells us, “He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a GOD of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.”⁹ Was GOD unjust in allowing His Covenant people here to endure suffering, which was brought about by their own apostasy and allowed as a corrective tool by the will of GOD? No, for GOD is just and right altogether; there is no injustice or wrongness within Him. Therefore all His judgements are just, even those that chastise His children whom He loves. In the remainder of JUDGES 3 we find the Israelites, having fallen into idolatry and sin since the death of Joshua, were given over to the King of Moab by The LORD and were thereby oppressed once again.

When they cried out, GOD raised up Ehud as a Judge over Israel. After Ehud single-handedly slew the King of Moab, he came before the people, calling to them as in JUDGES 3:28, “And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand...!”¹⁰ So again the Israelites were delivered and for a time served JEHOVAH, until they again fell away! So we see that GOD is just.

VI. GOD IS FULL OF GRACE

EPHESIANS 2:8 declares, “For by grace are ye saved through faith [in JESUS CHRIST]; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD”¹¹ In JUDGES 6 we again find the Israelites, having turned from The LORD, being delivered into the hands of Midian. This time the affliction drove the people of GOD into dens and caves and the hordes of the oppressors consumed all the sustenance of the land. Again in their sorrow the Israelites cried out to GOD for deliverance, and again – by GOD’s grace – they were sent a deliverer, Gideon the Judge.

⁸ KJV, JUDGES 3:4.

⁹ KJV, DEUTERONOMY 32:4.

¹⁰ KJV, JUDGES 3:28.

¹¹ KJV, EPHESIANS 2:8.

JUDGES 6:16-17 records that The Angel of The LORD appeared to Gideon and his response: “And The LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in Thy sight, then shew me a sign that Thou talkest with me!”¹² Gideon’s offering was accepted by GOD’s grace, and though he saw The Angel of The LORD, he did not perish. And though Gideon still doubted if GOD would deliver Israel through him, asking the sign of the dry fleece on the dew soaked ground and the dew soaked fleece upon the wet ground, GOD’s grace was still there to deliver His people.

And though the Israelites went up, according to The Almighty’s instructions to Gideon, with only a handful of men and their trumpets against the camp of the vast hosts of their enemies in the night, still by GOD’s grace they were victorious. GOD is full of grace to His people when they turn to him in repentance for deliverance, and by His grace are we saved. So we see that GOD is full of grace.

VII. GOD IS FORGIVING

I JOHN 1:9 states, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”¹³ In JUDGES 13-16 we find Israel, again having fallen into unfaithfulness to The LORD and oppression by the cruel Philistines as a result, being delivered in part by Samson. Samson is the last Judge of Israel recorded in The Book of JUDGES and is one of the most tragic of Biblical figures in The Old Testament. He was miraculously conceived to a barren womb. He was consecrated to GOD as a Nazarite from even before his birth. He was blessed with the gift of great physical strength. And The Spirit of The LORD was upon him.

Yet Sampson was a most imperfect Israelite. He married a heathen woman, though it was part of GOD’s design to use this to deliver Israel. When his wife was murdered by the Philistines, he took vengeance upon them. But when his own people chastised him for fear of their oppressors, he abandoned them. He doubted in his heart the

¹² KJV, JUDGES 6:16-17.

¹³ KJV, I JOHN 1:9.

purposes of The Almighty for his life foretold by an angel of The LORD to his parents before his conception. He turned from The Covenant of Moses and sought solace in the lusts of the flesh and the world. He sinned in fornication with Delilah, revealing to her what he should not have, thus betraying the charge he had been anointed with by The LORD.

But when Sampson lost his strength and was taken by the Philistines, when his eyes were put out, when he was made a prisoner and beast of burden under the lash of the heathen, when he was humiliated before men and seemingly abandoned by GOD, he cried out for GOD's forgiveness. For all these sins, GOD still forgave Sampson when he confessed and repented. And in doing so, GOD used Sampson one last time in answer to his prayer for the deliverance of Israel. So we read in JUDGES 16:28, "And Samson called unto The LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O GOD, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."¹⁴ So The LORD heard Sampson's prayer and gave him back his strength, enabling him to collapse the Philistine hall upon himself and taking with him in death thousands of Israel's oppressors. Indeed GOD is forgiving of our sins when we confess and repent of them.

VIII. IN CONCLUSION

So we see the nature of The Creator's character in The Book of JUDGES. He is faithful, merciful, longsuffering, just, full of grace and forgiving. Not that men should presume upon GOD's goodness as a blank check to engage in sin freely and willfully. Nor should we take the goodness of The LORD as reason to hope that we might be exempt from the judgements of His Law for our sins if we refuse to repent. Neither should the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve think that, by The Almighty's goodness, they might be worthy of His forgiveness and deliverance from earthly death and eternal separation from Him.

¹⁴ KJV, JUDGES 16:28.

But thanks be to GOD, it is exactly because The LORD is good in all that He is and does, that we may resort to Him in humble confession and repentance for the hope of earthly deliverance and eternal glory at The Cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST! For, as it is written in PSALM 106:1, "...O give thanks unto The LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever!"¹⁵ In the Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Spirit, AMEN.

¹⁵ KJV, PSALM 106:1.

IX. REFERENCES

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