

"HE GAVE THEM JUDGES."

– JUDGES 2:7-16 – NOVEMBER 16 –

"They cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses." – Psa. 107:19.

ISRAEL'S HISTORY from the time of the division of Canaan amongst the tribes until the anointing of Saul to be their king, a period of 450 years*, is called the period of the judges – Joshua being the first judge and Samuel the last. These judges were evidently not elected to their position, but raised to it providentially. But as these judges had no power or authority, collected no revenues and held no office which they could entail upon others, it follows that any power or influence they possessed was a personal one, and to give it weight or force implied a proper acknowledgement of them as divinely appointed or raised up. This arrangement led the people continually to look to God for their helpers and leaders rather than to engage in an ordinary claptrap of politics in which personal ambitions and spoils would dominate and control. God did the nominating, and the people in proportion as they would come into harmony with him took cognizance of his choice (and practically endorsed it or voted for it) by their acceptance of the judge. There may have been a more methodical procedure in some instances, as is intimated in our lesson (verse 7), where the elders of Israel who had witnessed God's miraculous interposition on their behalf and who outlived Joshua, seem to have constituted the judges in the different tribes.

*Millennial Dawn, Vol. II, Page 49.

This arrangement by which God gave Israel its judges is in considerable harmony with his dealings with spiritual Israel during this Gospel age – raising up for them from time to time special

counselors, deliverers, ministers. Similarly Spiritual Israelites are not to caucus and wire-pull and decide for themselves who shall be their spiritual leaders; but are to regard the Lord as the great Chief Captain, and to look to him to raise up from time to time such spiritual chieftains as he may please. The acceptance of the leadings of these as God's appointees does not necessarily mean their selection by ballot, but may be indicated merely by giving ear to their teachings in harmony with the Word of the Lord. The lead of such spiritual lieutenants of divine appointment will always be marked by spiritual victories and the bringing of the Lord's people into closer heart-relationship with him. Any leadership which does not produce such fruits is evidently not of the Lord; the spirit of the Lord leads not to bondage, ignorance or strife, but to love, joy, peace of heart, liberty of conscience.

Israel needed no congress or legislature, for it had one Lawgiver – the Lord – and the Law given at Mt. Sinai was to be perpetually the guide to the nation. The priests and Levites under the Law were the appointed helpers of the people in things pertaining to God – to instruct them in the Law and represent them in the typical sacrificing, atonement work, etc. In each tribe, also, the elders, according to their capacity, had charge of the civil affairs of the tribe. As for soldiers and a war department, they had none. The divine Law was to separate them from other nations, and if they would remain faithful to the Lord he was to be their protector against all antagonists.

Similarly spiritual Zion in every congregation is to look out from amongst themselves fit men for the services needed; God's Law is to keep them separate from the schemes and warfares and entanglements of the world; they are to be his peculiar people, and his pledge to them is that all things shall work together for their good so long as they abide faithful to him. They, therefore, need no armies armed with carnal weapons, although they are all soldiers of the cross, pledged to fight against sin, especially each within himself, and to lay down their lives for each other – "the brethren."

If the Book of Judges be read as a fully complete history of Israel for those four and one-half centuries, it would be a discouraging picture, and to some extent give the inference that they were continually in sin and idolatry, and suffering punishment therefor. But this would be an unfair view to take. On the contrary, the record passes by the happy period of Israel's prosperity, and specially points out their deflections from obedience to God and punishments for such transgressions and the deliverances from their troubles through the judges or deliverers whom God raised up for them. That this was in many respects a favorable time for the Israelites is implied in the Lord's promise, "I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning." – Isa. 1:26.

Incidentally the story of Ruth and of the parents of Samuel (I Sam. 1) give us little glimpses of the other side of the matter – of the God-fearing piety [**R3102 : page 331**] prevalent amongst many of the people, the happiness and contentment enjoyed. In our own day if we judge of the affairs of the world wholly by the daily history and details, in the newspapers, we might get the impression that crimes, strikes and accidents and imprisonments constituted the whole life in our own land; the great mass of the people attending to the ordinary affairs of life are scarcely mentioned. In accordance with this are the following lines from Whittier in which he rejoices in this land of liberty and blessing, notwithstanding the unfavorable reports thereof which go out to the world daily through the press, –

"Whate'er of folly, shame, or crime
Within thy mighty bounds transpires,
With speed defying space or time
Comes to us on the accusing wires;

"While all thy wealth of noble deeds,
Thy homes of peace, thy votes unsold,
Thy love that pleads for human needs,
The wrongs redressed, but half is told!"

The Israelites had been instructed by the Lord to utterly exterminate the people of the land, which extermination we saw in a previous lesson prefigured our conquests as spiritual Israelites over the desires of the fallen nature. Israel, however, settled down to enjoy the Land of Promise without fully exterminating the condemned ones; and the false religion of the latter, later on contaminated the Israelites through friendship and fellowship; and thus these whom God had condemned gradually alienated the hearts of many from their full, proper loyalty to the Lord; seducing many of them into a lascivious idolatry. So with the spiritual Israelites who do not wage a valiant battle against the natural desires of their own fallen flesh – they find shortly that the flesh prospers at the expense of the spiritual life and that truces with the flesh mean that their love for the Lord is gradually cooled until some form of idolatry creeps in – the love of money, or of praise of men or of self, etc., dividing with the Lord the love and reverence of their hearts.

We are not to suppose that all the Israelites fell away into idolatry; we are rather to understand that a considerable number of them became alienated for a time, repeatedly, from the love and worship of the **[R3103 : page 331]** Lord, and thus repeatedly brought upon them the Lord's disfavor. Verse 16 supports this thought, suggesting to our minds that our lesson is a condensed statement of the whole period of the judges – over four hundred years. Applying this to spiritual Israel we are not to expect that the Lord's displeasure with his people would delay until they had fully and completely gone into idolatry to self or wealth or fame; but rather that when some of the affections of the heart begin to go out to other things, the Lord's chastisements would be sent to reprove and rebuke and correct, while still there is in our hearts something of obedience and love toward him; – before the world, the flesh and the Adversary should have time to capture us completely.

These records of divine chastisements, and Israel's subsequent repentance, and the Lord's deliverances, were all proofs of the divine love and care for that consecrated people. So far as we have

information divine power was not exercised thus upon the other unconsecrated nations, for their reproof and correction, etc. They were left as strangers, foreigners, aliens from God and from his promises. So now the Lord's corrections in righteousness, his chastisements, etc., are evidences of special protection and care and relationship to the "house of sons." It is because of our acceptance in Christ and our consecration to the Lord, that he, in turn, has accepted us as sons and gives us the experiences, trials and difficulties needful to our testing and character-development; and it is to the intent that we may realize the treachery and the seductive influences of our own fallen natures, represented by the Amalekites and Canaanites, and that we may utterly destroy these, and thus come eventually into the condition mentioned by the Apostle when he declares that the consecrated should bring every thought into captivity to the will of God in Christ. – 2 Cor. 10:5.

When fleshly Israel learned one lesson after another, and as fast as each was learned sent a cry of loyalty up to God, his power was exercised on their behalf and their deliverance was effected. So with the Spiritual Israelite when he recognizes the true situation and with thorough repentance turns unto the Lord and cries for deliverance from his own weaknesses and imperfections according to the flesh; – his prayer is heard and his deliverance is provided for with the assurance that the Lord's grace is sufficient. The condition of the spiritual Israelite is represented in our Golden Text, "They cry unto the Lord in their trouble and he saves them out of their distresses." Such a cry to the Lord, however, implies that the sins and weaknesses of the flesh were contrary to the transgressor's will; it implies that in some manner he was seduced or entangled by the world, the flesh or the Adversary and that his heart is still loyal to the Lord and to the truth. All such who cry unto the Lord in sincerity and faith shall be heard, shall be delivered, – his grace is sufficient for us.

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