

GOD'S MERCIES TO DISOBEDIENT ISRAEL

– MARCH 28. – *QUARTERLY REVIEW.* – READ NEHEMIAH 9:26-31. –

THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES – DIVINELY APPOINTED LEADERS – THEIR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – ONLY ONE LAW-GIVER AND ONE LAW – TWO PICTURES OF ISRAEL'S NATIONAL LIFE UNDER THE JUDGES – MANIFESTATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE AND CARE FOR GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE – LESSONS FOR THE SPIRITUAL ISRAELITES.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." – Proverbs 14:34.

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 (Acts 13:19-21), 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 nor authority, collected no revenue 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 acknowledgment 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 ambition and spoils would dominate and control. God did the nominating; and the people, in proportion as they came 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; for 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 during the remainder of their lifetime. – Judges 2:7.

This arrangement by which God gave Israel their Judges is in considerable harmony with His dealings with Spiritual Israel during the Gospel Age – raising up for them from time to time special counselors, deliverers, ministers. Similarly Spiritual Israelites are not to caucus, 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, for 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 of the nation. The priests and the Levites, under the Law, were the appointed helpers of the people in things pertaining to God – to instruct them in the Law and to 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 Israel in every congregation are to look out amongst themselves for 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. Therefore they 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."

TWO PICTURES OF NATIONAL LIFE

If the Book of Judges be read as a fully complete history of Israel during those four and one-half centuries, it would be a discouraging picture and to some extent would 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 especially points out their deflections from God, the punishments for such transgressions, and the deliverances from their troubles through the Judges, or deliverers, whom God raised up for them. **[R5645 : page 75]** 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." – Isaiah 1:26.

Incidentally the story of Ruth and that of the parents of Samuel give us little glimpses of the other side of the matter – of the God-fearing piety 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, accidents and imprisonments constitute the whole life in our land; for the great mass of the people attending to the ordinary affairs of life are scarcely mentioned. **[R5646 : page 75]**

In accordance with this are the following lines from the poet 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 FRUITS OF DISOBEDIENCE

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 conquest 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 later on the false religions of the latter contaminated the Israelites through friendship and fellowship. Thus those 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 war 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 of the Israelites fell away into idolatry; we are rather to understand that repeatedly a considerable number of them became alienated for a time from the love and worship of the Lord, and thus repeatedly brought upon them the Lord's disfavor. 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, 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 of Israel's subsequent repentance and the Lord's deliverance are all proofs of the Divine love and care for that consecrated people. So far as we have information the Divine power was not thus exercised upon the other nations for their reproof, 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, 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. This is to the intent that we may realize the treachery and the seductive influences of our own fallen natures, represented by the Amalekites, the Canaanites, etc.; 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 Corinthians 10:5.

When Natural 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. Such a cry to the Lord 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; but that his heart is still loyal to the Lord and to the Truth. All such who cry to the Lord in sincerity and faith shall be heard, shall be delivered; for His grace is sufficient for us.

ISRAEL'S WRONG COURSE

The government of Israel was different from every other government in the world. God was their King; and in His providences, according to His Covenant with them, He supervised their affairs – whether by permitting them to go into temporary captivity because of unfaithfulness to Him, or by prospering the nation and guiding their efforts favorably when they lived in obedience to Him. In many respects their condition was most happy.

But in the days of the Prophet Samuel as the Elders perceived that his sons were not to be relied upon to follow in their father's steps and be faithful, impartial Judges, they forgot – or perhaps had never fully realized – that God was their real Judge, their King; and that Samuel was only His representative and

mouthpiece. They forgot that although Samuel was growing old, the Lord was "the same yesterday, today and forever," and able to raise up for them, in His own due time, a Judge of the kind best suited to their necessities. Doubtless, also, they did not realize that personally and nationally they were on a higher plane than the nations round about them that had kings. On the contrary, they felt that they were "out of style"; and, as people are very apt to do, they concluded that the majority must be right.

Influenced by this servility to custom, the Elders of Israel petitioned Samuel that he as God's representative would anoint for them a king – make them a nation of servants to one of their own nation. It is hard for us to sympathize with such ignoble sentiments, such prayers for their own degradation. Samuel seems to have viewed the matter from this standpoint, and perhaps he also regarded it as a personal slight to himself. However, he very properly took the matter to the Lord in prayer; it was not for him to decide – he was merely the Lord's [R5646 : page 76] mouthpiece and representative, to speak to the Israelites whatever message he should receive.

How grand it would be if the whole world could be under such rule – Heavenly Wisdom directing, and incorruptible earthly Judges communicating and enforcing the Divine Message and Law? The Scriptures inform us that this is what will eventually come to pass. (Isaiah 1:26.) However, before that grand condition can be realized, it will be necessary for the Messiah to take His great power and reign. Then the people will be ready to hearken to the voice of the Lord through those whom He will appoint and recognize as His mouthpiece. As it is written, "Thy people shall be willing in the Day of Thy power." – Psalms 110:3.

THE MESSIANIC REIGN AUTOCRATIC

In recounting to Israel the manner of a king, neither the Lord nor the Prophet Samuel meant that the description given would be

the proper one for a model king, but rather that it would be the general course of any man raised to such imperial power as the kings of olden time enjoyed. The wrong course of kings in general may be traceable to three conditions: (1) All men are imperfect and fallen, and hence in the case of any king it would be merely a question of the degree of imperfection and the tendency to pride, selfishness and abuse of power; (2) The imperfection of those over whom a king reigns makes possible, and to some extent reasonable, the usurpation of great power; (3) The Adversary's derangement of all earthly affairs, putting darkness for light, often makes it seem to both ruler and subjects that an abuse of power is really to the advantage of those ruled.

The question then arises, How will it be with Messiah's Kingdom? We reply that the Scriptures teach that His Rule will be autocratic in the extreme; nevertheless, no one who understands the matter need have any fear; for He who is to take the Throne of the world is the One who so loved the world as to give Himself a Ransom for all mankind. Instead of His Kingdom being one of selfishness, which would ruin its subjects for its own aggrandizement, He has shown His Spirit to be the very reverse of this, in that He left the glory of the Heavenly Courts and humbled Himself to a lower nature, in order to become man's Substitute – He "tasted death for every man." It is this One who is now highly exalted and appointed Heir of all things.

Let us also remember that the Church, now being selected from the world, is composed of those only who have their Master's Spirit and who delight to lay down their lives in co-operation with their Lord and Head. Let us remember that according to the Divine predestination none shall be of that elect class save those who are copies of God's dear Son; and that the tests of discipleship are such as to prove their love and loyalty to God, to Christ, to their brethren, to the world, yea, to their enemies also.

Who need fear an autocratic government in the hands of such a glorious King! Indeed, such a Government will be the most helpful, the most profitable, that the world could possibly have – wise, just, loving, helpful. Let us, therefore, who have been called to this High Calling lay aside every weight and every besetting sin, and, by the Lord's assisting grace, gain this great prize of joint-heirship with Him in His Messianic Kingdom, to have a share with Him in the blessing of all the families of the earth, in the recovery of whosoever will from sin and death.

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