

Tragedy in Israel

Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Judges 2:1-23

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It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

Does that phrase sound familiar to you? Charles Dickens made that statement famous in his book *A Tale of Two Cities*. Written in the mid 1800s he described in story format the economic and political conditions in Paris and London at that time just prior to the French Revolution, a time of great uncertainty, a time of great evil as well.

That phrase also describes the condition of the children of Israel throughout much of their history. And we find it particularly applying to them as we examine the record given to us in the book of Judges.

It as the best of times. It was the worst of times.

And we find especially described for us in chapter two of the book of Judges how that applies to the children of Israel. Notice in those first few verses, one through five of Judges chapter two.

Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you."

As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD.¹

¹ Judges 2:1-5.

This little section of verses does a couple of things for us. It summarizes for us what God has done for the children of Israel in the past. It also summarizes what God will do to the children of Israel because of their sin. He reminds them of what he did in bringing them out of Egypt, his great powerful works that he performed on their behalf, the plagues that he brought upon Egypt that ultimately led to the Egyptians dismissing them and driving them out. It describes for us, it reminds us of the works that God performed for them while they were living in the wilderness, his provision of water, his provision of food throughout those 40 years that they traveled to the Promised Land.

It also reminds us of what God did on their behalf as they entered into the Promised Land, how he defeated the enemies just like he said he would. If you will believe me and trust me and obey me, I will destroy the enemies before you and you will occupy and possess the land. And as the children of Israel believed and obeyed God, God fulfilled his promise. And they began to occupy the land.

But we read something kind of unusual. It says, “But what have you done”? What are you doing? What has gone on?”

Last time we looked at the occasion when the children of Israel began to doubt God’s promises and God’s Word. And they did not drive out the people of the plain who had iron chariots. They failed to believe God’s specific promise through Joshua that he would drive out those enemies who had and used iron chariots. And because of their unbelief, they began further to disobey God and began to assimilate the Canaanites into their own peoples. And as a consequence, they began to worship their idols and to follow their gods as well. And God warns them here in summary form and tells them what he will do because of their unbelief, their faithlessness and their disobedience.

We see a reminder here of the sin of the children of Israel, how they disobeyed God. They doubted him. And they began to worship idols as God had commanded them not to do. We read further in verses number six through 10 another reminder of a different kind. We read:

When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.²

The transition between God’s warning and reminding them of what he had done on behalf of them proceeds on now to the death of Joshua. Joshua their leader, the one whom

² Judges 2:6-10.

God appointed to take the place of Moses died. God had used him to lead them in successful battles against the Canaanites and the enemies. God had done many mighty works through Joshua on behalf of the people. And Joshua died. Notice that it then goes on to describe and say that there were other elders who of the age of Joshua lived a little longer than Joshua and they also died. And then it closes with a really sad refrain that says that there arose a generation that didn't know God nor his works.

This is the third generation from Egypt. The first generation that came out of Egypt they all died in the wilderness, because of their unbelief. They doubted God and God judged them by taking their lives before they even saw the Promised Land. They never saw it. Their children did. The second generation from Egypt, they saw the Promised Land. God took them in. They initially obeyed and believed and trusted God, but we notice that a breakdown occurred. A breakdown occurred between that second generation and the third generation.

God had instructed them very clearly in the wilderness that the fathers were to teach their children and to raise them up to follow and obey God and to worship him and him only, that he was God supreme and God exclusive. Worship him and him alone. Somehow that second generation failed. They did not bring their children up to follow after God. We see them in the previous passage when God had spoken to them and told them what would come because of their disobedience it says they wept. But notice they didn't repent. Oh, they had sorrow. They were sad to hear the news that God gave to them of their coming judgment, but at no point did they repent and turn. In fact, this section here where it talks about them, it describes them as abandoning God. It says they did not know him.

Now the word know in the Scripture has a variety of uses. And there are different words depending on the intent of the author. This does not describe mere factual knowledge. They had seen the works of God. They knew about God. They had some factual understanding and knowledge. But what this word describes, it describes an intimate relationship between people. It frequently, in fact, appears in Scripture to describe the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. They know each other. There is an intimacy between them. And this describes that kind of a relationship. Only notice it says they did not know God.

In other words, the children of Israel at this time, this third generation, did not have an intimate personal relationship with God. They knew about him. They heard about him. They knew about the works. But they did not know him in an intimate personal way. They disregarded him. They had no strong feelings towards him. They disregarded him. And it says they did not know his works. What that describes is their attitude towards the works that they observed that God had done. They didn't regard those works either. They had no influence upon their lives whatsoever.

The children of Israel did not have that close personal relationship with God that he desired to have with them. Instead, they deliberately chose not to obey him. We see that

described for us in the next section of verses, verses 11 through 13 of Judges chapter two. Notice what it says.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.³

When it says there that they did evil in the sight of the Lord, that didn't happen by accident. Sometimes we find ourselves through temptation or through ignorance committing sin. And we realize it after the fact. We say, "Oh, my goodness. I didn't tell the truth then. Oh, my goodness. I disobeyed God when I behaved in that fashion." And it happens almost by accident. We didn't plan to do that. We didn't plan to lie. We didn't plan to disobey God.

That does not describe this kind of evil. This kind of evil describes by deliberate intent they intentionally turned away from God. They purposefully abandoned him and pursued him no longer. It was a deliberate choice, not by accident.

And notice that it says that they bowed down to the gods that God had told them to destroy.

"When you go into the Promised Land, destroy not only the people, but destroy their altars. And destroy their altars, because if you leave them, they will be a snare to you and you will follow after them just like those children that you permit to live."

And when the children of Israel in doubt and disobedience failed to obey God and destroy the people and the altars, they ended up just like God said they would. They began to worship the gods about them and joined in the worship of false gods along with the Canaanites that they refused to destroy as God had commanded them.

So what is God going to do? How is God going to respond? Notice it says in verse number 14:

So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress. Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their

³ Judges 2:11-13.

fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not."

So the LORD left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua.⁴

We find described for us here some of the aspects of the nature of God that we don't like to see. We find here that God can get angry. His wrath against sin comes vividly in this circumstance with the children of Israel. They had observed it previously against their enemies the Canaanites. They saw God's wrath and judgment against them for their sin. Now God turns his anger and his judgment against the children of Israel, because they sinned and because of their disobedience and their doubt and their failure to obey God. He now begins to judge and discipline them for their sin.

Notice it says he is not going to defend them any longer. He abandons them. Well, what enabled them to overcome their enemies in the first place? Was it not God's presence and power on their behalf? And now God tells them that he will abandon them because of their unbelief and because of their sin.

Troubling times on the horizon. Furthermore, God says to them, "Not only will I abandon you, but I will become your adversary. I will join the side of your enemies against you."

If the children of Israel could only defeat their enemies with God on their side, what chance did they have when God went on the side of the Canaanites? They had no chance whatsoever. No ability in themselves to overcome their enemy. They only had hope as long as they believed and trusted God.

So God became their enemy.

And then we notice another aspect of God's character, however. He is a merciful God. His pity. It says he saw them in their distress. That describes someone suffering from claustrophobia. You understand claustrophobia, don't you, that hemmed in feeling, that

⁴ Judges 2:14-23.

closed in feeling that you get sometimes. And you can feel it especially with mobs of people, strangely so, people all about you, but you can still feel hemmed in and crowded and suppressed, enslaved. That describes the children of Israel, in distress because of their disobedience, because of their unbelief.

Well, God observed it all and it says he had pity on them. And this next section describes what we will study in future studies as we examine the judges that God raised up for them to defend them. Here we see it just kind of as an introduction. God raised up judges for them, powerful men, strong and mighty leaders to overcome the enemy. And they enjoyed peace as long as that judge lived. When that judge died, sadly, we notice the cycle repeating itself, going back into sin again, disobeying God worse than the previous generation. And then God again judging them, becoming their adversary and then raising up judges again in pity to protect and deliver them, a cycle that repeats itself throughout the whole record of the book of Judges.

We see that God uses it as a test, testing the children of Israel. Will you believe me like the first generation did that came into the Promised Land? They believed me. Will you believe me and trust me like they did or not? Sadly, the history of Israel shows us not. They did not believe and obey. Oh, there were times. There were occasions when they did, but soon doubt and disobedience followed close at hand, driving them further and further into sin.

Why would God move upon Samuel to write this record of the book of Judges, kind of a depressing book? Kind of a discouraging record? Why would God do this? I want to suggest to you a few reasons why God provides this record and provided it for the children of Israel. First of all he wanted the children of Israel to realize their true condition and their true nature without God. When they turned their back on God, what happened? They went into sin. They went into idol worship. They ended up slaves and plunderers came in and destroyed and took away all of their possessions. And they became subservient to the nations that God intended them to destroy.

Hopeless without God. But it also shows us that when the children of Israel did believe God and did obey him, God proved himself mighty on their behalf and he blessed them and he protected them and he provided for them.

We also see in this passage and we will see repetitively throughout the rest of the book of Judges, an ongoing revelation of God and his character and his nature. We notice here his anger and his wrath against sin. God hates sin. And he judges it. And we see it not only in the destruction of the Canaanites as they first entered the land, but we also see it here in the experience of Israel, his own chosen people. When they sinned and disobeyed and deserted God, he judged them as well and punished them and disciplined them for their sin.

We also see the sovereignty of God. God in charge of the nations. Not just a god of a small territory, not just the god of only one particular people, but the supreme sovereign

God over all things: the Canaanites, the plunderers and the Israelites, a sovereign God in charge of his creation.

We also see God as a holy God who cannot look upon sin and must punish it and discipline it. We also see God described as a pitying God, a God of mercy, a God of grace who provided for his children out of his pure grace. He could have left them in their sin and in their destruction, but out of grace and out of mercy he would raise up a judge to help them.

We also see God providing a warning for the children of Israel, for Samuel wrote this book for the children of Israel. And it provides for them a graphic warning, a warning to them of God's demands, a warning to them of God's judgment upon them when they fail to obey and to believe. And the certainty of that judgment that would come upon them, because of their sin. And it is also a book of remembrance to them of God's grace and mercy and how if they would just turn to God and trust him and what he would provide for them, they would experience his presence and his blessing among them once again.

How does this connect to Jesus? Does it in any way connect to Jesus? Remember when God created the heavens and the earth he created mankind without sin. When they sinned, God made a promise to them that he would send to them a Savior, a very simple description at the start, a seed of the woman would come and crush the head of the serpent, a simple description of a coming Savior.

But through time God began to progressively reveal more and more about his plan of providing this Savior. And he chose the family of Abraham and said, "Through your family will come that seed." So now we know the people. And then as those ... that family grew and multiplied as God said they would, we see him raising up saviors, examples for them. Moses became the first example. And then we see Joshua, vivid examples of a savior, the kind of savior that God would provide, powerful, strong, through whom they would experience victory over evil and sin and their enemies.

We see it here pictured with the judges to come. God would provide saviors for them in the form of judges who would provide victory and relief for them. And throughout succeeding history after the judges there were kings and prophets who came that God used to help further identify this Savior who was yet to come. And we find that all fulfilled in one man, Jesus Christ. He fulfills all of the pictures, all of the descriptions, all of the promises, all of the prophecies of the Savior who would come. And he came and it tells us that he took on human flesh. God taking on human flesh, a unique man, God and human in one person, Jesus, the Savior, the champion who in his lifetime overcame evil, who on his death on the cross defeated the serpent according to the promise that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden. He crushed the head of the serpent. He rose again from the grave victorious over death so that now all of the effects of sin that came through the temptation of the serpent and through all of his evil machinations and temptations that he has brought upon mankind can now find salvation through faith in God's Savior, Jesus. And all those who place their faith and trust in Jesus would find relief. Jesus promised that.

Well, what correlation does all of this have to us today? Where does it apply to us? How do we fit in all of this?

Well, we certainly can heed the warnings that God gave through writing of this book that originally went to the children of Israel. For this book vividly describes our very day. We live in a day that fits the description of the book of Judges: evil present, idol worship abounding about us. We even find a professing church that has succumbed to the temptations of the world and has declined in its obedience and its faith in God and has begun to rest upon the world and what the world can provide for it. And so we see the description in Judges fitting very clearly to our circumstances today. Not only the world, but also the Church.

And because of the record that we have that God has provided for us through the book of Judges and the warnings that it provided for the children of Israel, we can recognize that same warning. And we can heed the warning that God gave through this book to those peoples centuries ago and we can begin to believe and to trust and to cast our hope and confidence upon God's Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And in him will we have hope, certainty, rest, reconciliation with God, victory over evil in our personal lives daily.

And then the Church can recognize restoration when it would follow the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has promised. He has told us that if we will obey and worship him and him alone that he will bless us. And the Church can experience a revival and a restoration, a renewal from its present spiritual decline if it would heed the warning that we see provided for us in Judges.

What can the Spirit of God do with these truths as we have looked at them and how can he apply them in our lives today? He can refute error. We may have a false view about God. We may have a false view about ourselves and about mankind. And these truths open our eyes to the truth that God wants us to see and understand. They can reassure us. They can rebuke us and they can point out to us our failure and our unbelief and our disobedience.

How will you respond to these truths and to the work of the Spirit of God as he comes to you? You can just reject it. Set it aside and say, "I don't believe it. Interesting story. But I don't believe it. I don't have any interest in it." You can be just like the children of Israel, deliberately, intentionally set it aside. You could say, "{?}, tomorrow. I will think about it again. Maybe the next day I will think about it again. I will ponder this some more. Sounds interesting."

I would remind you, my friends, you don't have tomorrow. Tomorrow never comes. You only have today. And so if the Spirit of God has opened your eyes to see the truth even just a glimmer of the truth, that is enough on which to cast your faith and your confidence and come to trust the Savior that God provided according to his promise, Jesus Christ, the only Savior of sinners like you and like me.

I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see the truth, that he will reassure you with the truth and that he will bring you to faith and trust and confidence upon the Savior that God has provided for us and that today will mark the day when you will trust him and trust him anew, trust him repeatedly, trust him with reassurance. But all that he said is true says to us, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." Simple faith, based upon maybe just a glimmer of truth, but can make an eternity of difference.

I pray that the Spirit of God will bring that into fruition in your lives today.

Let's close with prayer.