

The Book of Judges

Lesson 3 - Chapter 2

Judges chapter 1 gave us a short background on the political situation in the Land of Canaan that reflects the time approaching Joshua's death and then perhaps the next decade as the elders closest to Joshua took over leadership after he was buried. In a nutshell it was that the people of Israel failed at conquering Canaan. After the land was divided up it became each tribe's duty to finish ridding itself of any remaining Canaanite tribes and pagan worship sanctuaries. It is important to understand that the land was divided up based NOT on what was actually conquered, or on merit, but rather by how God had assigned the territory through lots, at the time of Moses. That allotment put the various tribes in general regions of the Promised Land: north, south, near the Jordan, or in the west, and such. Joshua fine-tuned that with another and later ceremony whereby the relative SIZE of each territory was adjusted to account for the population differences among the tribes; bigger tribe, bigger territory.

Even so, it also more meant that the assigned territory was the responsibility of each tribe to finish the job of conquest within their own particular land holding. In the Book of Joshua we saw the Lord defeat His enemies using Yehoshua (Joshua) as His earthly, physical agent. We are told of the great battles of the north and the south of Canaan and how they were fought between vast armies employing hundreds of thousands of soldiers on each side. And we saw as the Lord decisively won these battles and as a result Israel won; meaning that they could now attain sufficient rest in the land that they could rightly declare it as their own and settle there. However after Joshua's victory and death the battling wouldn't end; each tribe was obligated to continue the fight for his own immediate territory somewhat indefinitely. Israel has been told repeatedly that IF they will be obedient to the Lord, then He will fight for them and victory will be theirs. If not then the struggle will be painful and full of difficulties and defeats. This is a great illustration (and I think probably an ordained God-pattern) that foreshadows the battle that the army of another Yehoshua who came 1300 years later would face; the one we know as Jesus of Nazareth (whose name is indeed Yehoshua, grammatically shortened to Yeshua) would also lead us to great victory IF we will follow him devotedly.

Maybe the parallel is already forming a picture in your minds. God through Yeshua fights an enormous battle and defeats His great enemy Satan, for our benefit. Yehoshua is the physical human agent of this Holy War, but God is the one who fights and leads to victory. Yeshua dies in the process and then each of His followers who are actually part of that victory must continue the fight on his or her own turf.....our own lives.....as the battle (although already won in one sense, is incomplete in another sense) will continue until a time preordained by YHWH, but unknown to men.

It is also interesting that BOTH the major but incomplete victories of Joshua and then Jesus (Yehoshua and the later Yehoshua) will become complete at the same moment: the Battle of Armageddon. All the daily turf wars and individual battles we fight will finally be over because the Holy War will finally be complete. The conquest for earth and for the eradication of evil will

finally be at an end.

Judges chapter 1 went to some length to show that NONE of the tribes properly carried through with their own individual turf wars; some tribes won additional cities and surrounding areas and weren't able to take other areas; and other tribes simply weren't able to gain an inch. Again I see an illustration so perfectly paralleled to the daily life of a Believer that it must be a God-pattern. We will fight every day, win some and lose some. Some of us will be more determined and dedicated; others of us will sadly put up little resistance. But in the end none of us will have perfectly executed God's will for our redeemed lives.

Further we're told that the Israelites tended to make forced laborers out of the residents of areas they did gain control over instead of deporting them as the Lord had instructed. And in other cases they simply went through a process of assimilation and blended with their neighbors.

All of this led to Israel sliding so rapidly into idolatry that it is truly breathtaking. We tend to see everything from ancient times happening in slow motion as compared to modern times. But that is not at all necessarily so. There are some wicked actions that we can take, some turns down a road that is not God's will, that are so drastic and explosive in their consequences that negative changes begin to happen almost overnight. Israel's behavior and decision process at the end of Joshua's time and then during the era of the **Shophetim** was one such action.

I greatly fear that the unease we Believers feel today within the Western world in general (and our wonderful nation in particular) as we watch millions of our fellow citizens enthusiastically revel in moving rapidly towards a secular society (which, by the way, is an inevitability), will lead us to exactly a similar point as we will read over the next few months about the era of the **Shophetim**, the Judges. And the eerie parallel between the time of the Judges and today in our time is amplified when we consider that it was a huge population of people of a false religion that Israel decided to appease rather than extinguish. They decided to engage them in diplomacy and compromise. They decided to give up some land to them, and in other instances let them live in Israeli territory. The Hebrews found ways to rationalize away God's instructions, the immutable principles that govern this Universe, and forget mankind's own history that proved at every turn that in compromise only evil wins even when at first it may seem like the peaceful and logical thing to do.

Chapter 2 begins with God's only possible response to Israel's collective decision to follow their own way and abandon Him. God's nature is such that He can do nothing else but employ righteous justice upon His own set-apart people when they rebel and sin against Him. I laugh, cry, and turn red with anger and then pale with worry when I hear some of our most respected Christian leaders proudly tell the flock that the days of God's justice upon His own people are over. If that is true then we have no choice but to drop our assertion that God never changes. We are basically told that we indeed have purchased our Heavenly fire insurance policy at Salvation, and that we are exempt from expecting discipline and punishment when we freely rebel and trespass against our Lord. That is NOT true, nowhere in the Old or New Testaments is that said, and such license to sin so long as we're redeemed is so against every God-pattern that it boggles the mind how such a doctrine was ever formed. And it is terribly

dangerous to the spiritual health of each Believer and the body of Messiah in general.

The people of Israel during the time of the Judges generally adopted that exact attitude. We're the Lord's redeemed people, and have been given rest in our own land. The Father would NEVER do anything but BLESS His own people, right? They were about to find out that if God does NOT administer His justice then He is not truly holy. And as we have all learned, the Lord is so perfectly holy that He will destroy the entire Universe and everything in it to protect that holiness; such is His unmatched divine purity and righteousness and the demands that He places upon all who freely choose to call upon His saving name.

READ JUDGES CHAPTER 2 all

There is so much here (even though it might not seem so) and I don't want to short-change it so we're going to spend all of this week and then next week as well only, on this chapter. Be aware that you may be surprised at how personal and meddling the words of this chapter might be for us all.

Right out of the chute we get the words, now the "angel of the Lord". The Hebrew is, "the malach of YHWH", and as we have discussed in prior lessons **malach** does NOT mean angel it means messenger. It's only that in certain contexts it is taken to MEAN that the messenger IS an angel, a spirit being.

Interestingly in many places in the Bible where we run across this term, Jewish scholars and rabbis insist that this is actually a HUMAN messenger, a prophet that is being referred to. And that is one way around a problem that Christianity also struggles with about the identity of "the angel of the Lord". The problem is what or who is the angel (the **malach**) of the Lord? Here in Judges 2:1 many of the greatest Hebrew sages say that this is simply a human prophet who has journeyed from Gilgal to deliver a message from God. They assume this because if it is a spirit being, then one has the spirit being speaking in the first person: "I". And if that is the case then it is hard to deny that the spirit being is identifying himself as God. That is not something that Judaism accounts for. However it is common for a prophet to speak the actual words from God, like reading a prepared speech, using "I". The difference is that the prophet ALWAYS prefaces those words with some form of, "this is a message from God". And certainly that is not the case here.

Christianity on the other hand has adopted the concept of the Trinity whereby God can manifest Himself AS God in as many as 3 ways. Therefore to have a spirit being speak as "I, the Lord" and yet not necessarily be identified as God the Father still leaves 2 other choices: the Holy Spirit and the Son (Yeshua). With this doctrine of the Trinity the only argument becomes, which of the Trinity IS the angel of the Lord and the usual answer is that it is the Son.

I must tell you that even if we have a nice selection of 3 different square pegs in the Trinity, we're still trying to pound them into a round hole called the angel of the Lord. I believe that while in the era of Yeshua we indeed saw recorded primarily the workings of the Father, the

Holy Spirit, and the Son (all who are one, God), I am skeptical that these are the ONLY possible manifestations of YHWH. That He is limited to those alone, making those 3 His total and complete essence is not something that is entirely apparent. There is nothing Scripturally that SAYS that God is 3 in 1 and ONLY 3 in 1. There is the Shekinah that is spoken of that doesn't fit the description of any of those 3, and there is the angel of the Lord that presents yet another variation, and we even have a physical apparition that appeared to Abraham and spoke and ate with him, another that physically wrestled with Jacob, and there are some other possibilities as well and they are all in some mysterious ways attached to God and said to be God.

Wherever you may fall in this debate, in any case there is utterly no doubt that the angel of the Lord is a spirit being and not a man by the straightforward context. I think in the long run we're better off to accept that the angel of the Lord is a direct manifestation of YHWH and be satisfied to leave it there rather than attempting to rationalize it with any doctrine, Jewish or Christian. When it comes to the spirit world we are so limited in our insight, ability to comprehend, and to find words that are necessarily of this physical world to describe and illustrate the spiritual.

This angel of the Lord then proceeds to speak to the people of Israel at a place identified as Bokhim; we don't know where this place is and in reality Bokhim isn't really a proper name or title. It simply means, weepers (as in people crying). And in a couple of verses we'll see that is because weeping was Israel's collective reaction to the words of the angel of the Lord.

Verse 1 bursts forth with additional momentous words from God: "I will NEVER break My covenant with you". What did God just say? He said NEVER, NEVER, NEVER will I break the covenant that I have established with you, Israel. He did NOT say if you break the covenant then I will break the covenant. He did NOT say that under the right circumstances He will break the covenant. Compare this to Matthew 5:17-18:

CJB Matthew 5:17 "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. 18 Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.

So, God says He will not break the covenant, and later Yeshua says He will not break the covenant. The angel of the Lord brings the good news to Israel that despite the difficulties and chastisement from God that may be coming their way, Israel (and no one else present or future for that matter) is to interpret what is about to happen to Israel as the Lord making a decision to break the covenants He has made FOREVER with Israel. While here the direct reference is actually to the Covenant of Moses, it inherently also includes the Covenant of Abraham because the Covenant of Moses is based on the Covenant of Abraham.

Thus it should come as no surprise that 1300 years later the Word of the Lord, Yeshua, as He is giving His famous oracle on a hilltop overlooking the Sea of Galilee also tells all who were present and listening (and who will ever listen), that despite what may be coming do not EVER interpret it to mean that the Lord has made a decision to break the covenants He has made

with Israel. And then He specifically refers to the Covenant of Moses (the Law, the Torah) and then the Prophets (meaning that ALL of His promises will happen). Isn't it the most amazing thing that the vast majority of the body of Messiah today still insists that breaking the covenants is exactly what the Lord did!? We can twist a phrase any way we like; but abolishing, ending, revoking, replacing are all just another way of saying "breaking".

As I said at the outset today, there is so much here; so let's summarize and put into some kind of format exactly what it is that the angel of the Lord told Israel and the rationale behind it.

First the Lord reminds Israel just what He has done for them. He has rescued them from Egypt, and then brought them to the land He promised Abraham so long ago. He has fought ahead of Israel and won, and now Israel can be at rest in their own land. Yet they are not at complete rest because they did not fully follow God's commands to rid the land of Canaanites. Still the Lord says, despite this disobedience, He is not going to break the covenant He made with Israel (implying that Israel certainly deserves the covenant to be revoked, but because of His own holy nature He will not do that). Now they can walk away from the covenant, dissociate themselves from the covenant community and therefore not be UNDER the covenant community's covenant, but the covenant remains intact.

Second WE are reminded that the Covenant of Moses is a conditional covenant. The condition is that Israel must be faithful and obedient to YHWH if they can expect to have fruitfulness and rest in Canaan, or even to remain there. That faithfulness and obedience was generally wrapped up in the Lord's demands that Israel make no covenants (peace treaties and political agreements) with the Canaanites, and that Israel should destroy all the pagan idols and places of worship that dotted the land.

Next the Lord points His heavenly digit at Israel and says, "you haven't done this". In other words YHWH accuses the Hebrews of blatantly not doing the very things He said were mandatory and would have dire consequences if Israel did not obey.

After the accusation (and the conviction) the Father issues His judgment upon them: "I will not drive out (the Canaanites" before you". Whereas when Joshua was alive Yehoveh lead the battles and ensured the victories, now He says He is backing away and Israel is on their own. The result of this says God, is that the enemy will stay rooted in the land and become a snare and a thorn for you.

Israel's response to this startling oracle and judgment was that they wept bitter tears and began wailing loudly at what they had done and what it would mean for their present and future. That is why the place was given the name of Bokhim, the place of weepers.

From verses 6 –10 we have essentially a repeat of Joshua 24. The editor of this book of Judges was obviously making the direct link between the time of Joshua and the Judges. It is explained that after the covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem whereby all agreed to continue to abide in the Mosaic Covenant, Joshua dismissed the people to go home to what was now their own land, given as a gift from YHWH. It is stated that Yehoshua and his staff were able and obedient followers of the Lord God. Thus Joshua lived to the ripe old age of 110

years and was given the privilege of being buried on his own property, in the Promised Land, in close proximity to his ancestors.

Let me take a momentary detour. Verse 9 has a small (and I think quite interesting) oddity that I think provides an opportune insight into something that I've discussed with you before: ancient copyist errors in the Bible. Look at where it speaks of the place that Joshua owned as his personal land holding and was buried. In every version that I have investigated it says that the place was called Timnath-Heres. But now look at Joshua 19:50. It says:

JB Joshua 19:50 According to ADONAI's order they gave him the city he had asked for, Timnat-Serach in the hills of Efrayim; so he built up the city and lived in it.

Notice that in Judges it is called Timnath-Heres and in Joshua Timnath-Serach. Two different names, but actually they're not. More correctly transliterated to English in Judges it should say Timnath –Cheres (with a "ch" not an "h"). The name in Judges is the result of a minor copyist error many centuries ago that has been perpetuated. It has resulted in all sorts of inventive ways to find a meaning for the word cheres. In the end, there is no such word, but there's been no lack of speculation and assignment of various meanings (not unlike the way the word Shaddai was treated for centuries). Basically the problem is that the consonants that form the second half of the place name of Joshua's private land somehow got reversed. In Hebrew Serach is samech-reysh-chet. Heres is chet-reysh-samech; exactly reversed. The Hebrew alphabet essentially does not have vowels, so one simply has to infer how to pronounce a Hebrew word because it is written only with consonants and no vowels.

Remember that in ancient times every scroll had to be hand written. So copyist errors of spelling were fairly common. They are usually easy to spot and most have been corrected over the centuries in the Hebrew Bibles, but the English versions have been very slow to follow since almost all are based on Greek and Latin texts, some of which accounted for copyist errors and others did not. Well, back to what we were doing.

These 5 verses ends with a phrase we have heard so many times up to this point when it is written that the entire generation (the 2nd generation of the Exodus) "was gathered to their ancestors". Here we have that phrase that described how it was that even the Hebrew people looked upon death; it was with a foundation of Ancestor Worship in mind. They would go to their graves and some essence of them would commune in some unknown way with their ancestors. Of course this was only possible (in their minds) because those ancestors (mainly the Patriarchs) were buried in the same place (Canaan) and thus not separated by spiritual/territorial boundaries.

We're told that a new generation arose after Joshua, one that didn't know YHWH or know the work He had done on Israel's behalf. We are literally talking about the passing of only ONE generation after Joshua died. ONE!! In only a couple of decades the mixing with the Canaanites had so perverted the Israelites that they were quite familiar with Ba'al and Ashtoreth, but they knew almost nothing of Yehoveh. To say that they did not know of what God had done for them doesn't mean they were ignorant and unformed; it means they judged it as irrelevant to their lives and they had no gratitude to those who came before them and

fought to give them the life they now took for granted. Syncretism had made the God of Israel barely a second thought for them.

Every time we have Veteran's Day or Memorial Day and I see those proud and wrinkled men (and how very few of them there are remaining), handing out poppies or flag pins in malls or on street corners, some of them wearing parts of their well-worn uniforms or perhaps service medals from WWII, I get concerned. I watch as younger men and women pass them by without a glance; a generation of people who have no idea what war really is, or what sacrifice really is. People who have no concept (or interest) that millions gave their lives for the good and free life they now live. I listen to them as they naively pontificate about how THIS time in our modern and progressive era, unlike all the other times in history, THIS time instead of fighting wars we'll be able to have civilized talks with our enemies (who swear to destroy us) and with the right words from the right men they'll listen. THIS time if we appease them just a little bit more, if we can just understand their side of it better, they'll be satisfied and not bother us any more.

I cringe as I listen to Meet the Press, and the Presidential debates, and hear the men who want to lead us tell us that the current state of mankind is now unlike any other and because men are so inherently good and our knowledge so great we CAN come together in world peace if we determine together to do so. That all men just want the same things, and that to label ANYONE as evil (even a vicious Muslim leader who openly speaks of his desire to lay Israel waste, to rule the world and kill all who resist the will of his god Allah) is an unintelligent, hateful and counterproductive thing to do. Because after all, who is so arrogant as to be the one who thinks he can identify the line between evil and good?

This prevalent and popular mindset has developed a mere 60 years after 100 million people died either as victims or from fighting to save the world from the greatest evil we have known up to this point in mankind's short history. But now, after only 6 decades, it all counts as but meaningless history relevant only for old people and recorded in dusty history books. So it ought to be awfully easy for those of us who are Baby Boomers especially to identify with what is being described in the 2nd chapter of Judges whereby in a remarkably short time the conquest of Canaan and the God who freed Israel from Egypt have become old news to the very people who benefited the most.

Verse 12 is one of the saddest in the Book of Judges, maybe the whole Bible. It says:

JB Judges 2:12 They abandoned ADONAI, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, selected from the gods of the peoples around them, and worshipped them; this made ADONAI angry.

There is no hiding the truth; by worshipping other gods Israel has abandoned YHWH. As we will see in coming chapters, Israel did not THINK they had abandoned YHWH. Most still held a place in their worship of the divine for Him, however small it might have been. Most indeed worshipped some combination of the Ba'als and Yehoveh. And by this they would insist and insist that they had NOT abandoned Him. But their and our standard of what abandonment amounts to does not matter; it is the Lord's standard that He will use as a measure and most

of Israel did not measure up. I wonder if we measure up? I told you this would get personal and draw precise parallels to the modern church age.

The gods who surrounded Israel went by many names, most only being the same name translated into the local language. Remember, to say “Canaanite god” was just a general term meaning the gods of the various tribes and nations who lived within the rough borders of the former land of Canaan. Ba’al became Hadad in Syrian to the north. Dagon was Philistine for El in the south and west. Astarte was Sidonion (the residents of Sidon) for Ashtoreth in the northeast. Eostre was Anglo-Saxon for Ashtoreth, and Easter was English for Ashtoreth. Mot was the Assyrian god of the underworld, and Yam equal to Neptune the god of the Sea. On and on it went, but all of these names of the gods were of the same Mystery Babylon pantheon of gods that arose from Nimrod’s era.

What was Yehoveh’s reaction? He became angry. The words, to “follow other gods” were more literal than we typically think. In those days, and still in many cultures, a god image would be held and carried by priests or servants or maybe a king who served that god and a procession of followers and worshippers would march in procession behind it. A parade of sorts was held to honor that god as they took his image to or from his or her temple. So when the Bible speaks of following other gods, it brought a very vivid and real picture to the minds of those who wrote and read these verses in earlier times. Perhaps a more modern illustration is of an evil Pied Piper who enchants all those who pay attention to him and leads them (much to their surprise) off a cliff and into destruction.

Next week we’ll begin by discussing a little more about God’s reaction to Israel’s apostasy.