

INTRODUCTION: We rightly celebrate the picture of our faithful Shepherd Jesus as He gives His life for the sheep in the Gospels and as His teaching is reaffirmed by the Apostles in the New Testament Letters. But in the Old Testament too we see the Lord's shepherding care for His people *as they face the very same threats and heart-breaking trials which occur in our day*. These notes, therefore, represent a return to the past to see God's glorious work in the days of Joshua and the book of Judges. We start by going back to first principles, (namely), the depravity of man, and God's persistence in saving power to remember His covenant promises – despite His own people's sinfulness. For this week we focus on God's covenant faithfulness in the book of Judges.

Monday: read Judges 2:1-6 and Psalm 139:23-24. We teach our children the value of repetition as we take them back again and again to certain fundamental lessons which take time to learn. No parent makes a bed just one time with their child and expects them to repeat the bed-making by themselves from then on. No one gives only a few minutes of help to their offspring in learning to ride a bike, and then let's them sail down the hill by themselves. It is a process of patiently repeating the mechanics of pedaling, turning and balancing until the child feels ready to ride on their own, or to fold sheets properly before a bed is done.

How much more is this true of the Lord, as He takes His people back to first principles, and to their first days with Him as their God - especially when they show by their wandering that they have not learned the lessons of faith needed for them to inherit the Promised Land. Because of their not listening to the Lord, He must test them in the desert once again, even as He tested their forefathers in the desert.

Meditate and Pray: "Lord, we would begin this study of your people's backsliding in the Book of Judges by asking you to search and test us, even as you tested Israel of old. We confess that we cannot discern our own errors and blind spots. We easily wander into a reliance on the gods of this world, and drift away from you. Please try us, and know our inmost thoughts, and then in forgiving grace lead us in your ways, for your Name's Sake, Amen." Sing about the need for God to constantly test and correct us, using hymn # 37 from our Red Trinity Hymnals:

*All that I am I owe to Thee,
Thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful praise,
Whose wondrous works my soul amaze.*

*Ere into being I was brought,
Thine eye did see, and in Thy thought
My life in all its perfect plan
Was ordered ere my days began.*

*Thy thoughts, O God, how manifold,
More precious unto me than gold!
I muse on their infinity,
Awaking I am still with Thee.*

*Search me, O God, my heart discern,
Try me, my inmost thought to learn;
And lead me, if in sin I stray,
To choose the everlasting way.*

Tues/Weds: read Judges 2:7-23 and Psalm 78:4-8. Though Judges 1 records some progress on the part of God's people in eradicating Canaan of the wicked Canaanites, there is still the

presence of idols in the land – as we see from Israel’s rapid departure from God to serve the Baals in Judges 2. As soon as Joshua’s generation died, there arose a generation “who did not know the Lord”. Not surprisingly, they quickly fell away into the worship of Baal. The burning question is, How could this happen so quickly and with such terrible effect in Judges 2:7-23? We thought about this question in earlier Bible notes on Psalm 78, but it deserves more attention. There are at least two reasons to look at right now.

One reason is that some of these parents failed to instruct their children in the word and works of the Lord. Because they ignored their responsibility to instruct their offspring in spiritual things, we have the shocking statement that there “**arose** a generation who did not know the Lord” (Joshua 2:10). These parents did not do the parental instruction God commanded in Psalm 78:4-8: “...that the generation to come might know His laws, the children who would be born, that they may **arise** and declare them to their children...”.

Yes, to be sure, those who fell away bear their own personal guilt. There really is no excuse to fall away from the very God who had saved them out of Egypt. Yet, it can happen that parents who are dramatically converted, like the Hebrews coming out of Egypt - who see God’s hand dramatically at work in their own lives ... can expect their own children to likewise be dramatically converted, and therefore slip into parental neglect of the more daily, domestic duty of spiritual instruction in the home. How sad that this generation arose to be those who “did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel”.

Meditate and Pray: “Oh, may the Lord have mercy upon our children. More than that, let us cry out to our Savior Jesus, whose intercessions continue for His church (Heb. 7:27), that His prayers would prevail even for covenant children who have departed from the faith of their parents. They will bear their own guilt for doing so, but you, Lord, have the power to bring them back. Amen.”

Thurs/Fri: read Judges 2:7-23 and Deuteronomy 11:10-12. Another reason the generation of God’s people in Canaan so quickly departed from the faith of their fathers is that they gave into the pressure of the Canaanites around them. For centuries the Canaanites enjoyed living under the blessing of God on the Land of Canaan. As Deuteronomy 11:12 makes clear, God had a special regard for this land, and blessed it for the sake of His covenant, so that one day His people could inherit it as their possession.

But the Canaanites thought it was *their own hands and skill* that produced the untold wealth of a Land which ‘flowed with milk and honey’. They thought their *own* religion and *their* hard work created prosperity for them. But the reality was that God only allowed them to “rent” Canaan for a certain number of years. Then, when their sin had filled up to the full measure of guilt, (as God predicted to Abraham would happen in Genesis 15:16), Israel would then enter the land to destroy them.

But here is the complicating factor. Instead of ridding the Promised Land of the Canaanites, the invading force under Joshua failed to go to war against the Land’s inhabitants, and instead settled

down with them and even gave their children in marriage to them! It was hard for a former slave race of Hebrews to resist the wealth of the Canaanites! So, to “cover all their bases” and thereby protect their new-found wealth, Israel added the god of fertility, Baal, to their worship of Jehovah. *That* is how we are to understand the lightning quick fall in Judges 2:11-23.

Meditate and Pray: *“Lord, protect our families from the love of wealth, which makes us worry more than we should about how to protect it. Keep us from believing the lie that people have successful lives when they are wealthy. Look upon us and love us, and direct us through your Word how we might always have the joy of loving you more than these things”. Amen.*

Sat/Sun: read Judges 2:11-23 and 2 Peter 3:1-7. Along with an idolatrous devotion to their prosperity and wealth, the peoples surrounding the Hebrews had an idolatrous belief that their lives of pleasure and success would continue unchanged throughout all their years as a nation. They believed that the sun would always shine on them, and the needed rains would always come. Why would they need the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? This is their question. Since their lives worked so well without the Lord, operating so smoothly under “laws of nature” – springtime and harvest, summer and winter - why should they now follow a God who led His people through fiery furnaces in Egypt, and through years of want in the desert? No! They didn’t believe in such a God of suffering and trial, and they certainly wouldn’t let such a God ruin their pursuit of the good things of this life. Peter’s words sum up this terrible attitude:

Know this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:3-7)

Meditate and Pray: “O Lord, teach us as your Church a lesson from hard-hearted worldlings, such as the inhabitants of Canaan or the scoffers of 2 Peter 3:3. Teach us the importance of waiting upon you, and taking advantage of the days of Gospel Grace in which we live. Please don’t let us waste our opportunities to be found and saved by you. How terrible it is for the Canaanites, who in their unbelief completely mismanaged their years of abundance, so that the coming of God in judgement could never be at the right time for them. They abused the years of God’s goodness, and the days of sunshine and plenty which they enjoyed in their wealthy farms and houses. When judgment finally came at the hands of the God, it was too late for them to find any room for repentance. Lord, teach us to set the clocks of our lives by the reality of the present Day of Salvation, and the future Day of Final Judgment. Amen.”