

From Judges to Jesus - Part 2

We pick up in the second chapter of the book of Judges: the Angel of the Lord exhorts and reprimands the people of Israel based upon God's faithfulness to them. How do they respond? We see that the Israelites wept and offered sacrifices to God (**Judges 2:3-4**). Despite this show of repentance, it appears that their remorse over their sin isn't genuine because they repeatedly turn their backs on God, sin greatly against Him; and, worship other gods. The Rock at Shechem is a witness to their dishonor and disloyalty to God (**Judges 2:11-12, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1-2, 6:1-2, 6:10, 10:13-14**). In reading these passages of scripture, we see a pattern for the Israelites:

- God would allow the consequences of their sin to impact them.
- They would be given over and subject to their enemies.
- The pain and torment of their sin and treatment at the hands of other nations would humble them and cause them to be humbled and remorseful for their sin.
- They would turn their hearts once again to the Lord.

In the 6th chapter of Judges, we are introduced to Gideon (**Judges 6:11-16**). We see that Gideon isn't willing to acknowledge not only the sin of Israel, but, his own sin as well. As a result, Gideon and the Israelites are slaves to and tormented by the Midianites. There may be some Israelites who are trying to live righteously, but the reality is that Israel is so steeped in sin that the Lord will not allow them to advance but instead be subject to the people in the land.

In reading the book of Judges, we become increasingly aware that God doesn't relate to Israel on the basis of their behavior, their performance or their strength – BUT – relates to them based on HIS STRENGTH, HIS PERFORMANCE and HIS GRACE. There's nothing we can do to "earn" this – it has already been done by Jesus because He loves us! (**Judges 6:22-24**). This fact is illustrated when the Lord reduces the number of men going in to battle with the Midianites from 32,000 to 300 – the Lord doesn't want Israel to think that they are delivered from the consequences of their sin by their own strength. They are triumphant through and by the Lord's strength. God's desire was to lead Gideon and Israel into peace. Their deliverance was to bring them peace but their sin had broken that peace.

The book of Judges records a number of acts of deliverance, but, the deliverance is seldom righteous and uplifting. There is a theme of deliverance in this book that uses the 3 important feasts celebrated by Israel: **Sukkot**, **Passover** and **Pentecost**. The pattern we see is one of Perversion and Distortion around these 3 feasts:

- There's not a celebration of God's goodness and faithfulness but rituals of violence.
- Israel PERPETUATES what they shouldn't have begun, and, FORGETS what they should have remembered.
- When we look at the behavior of Israel, we are looking at the broken human condition.

Gideon begins his career with impressive humility, but, soon like Saul he turns into a brutal leader (**Judges 6:15, 1 Samuel 9:21**). Gideon's brutality is portrayed in feast-of-Tabernacles-like terms: the feast of Tabernacles is celebrated on the 15th of Tishri, towards the end of the grape harvest; the Israelites gather fruits & branches from palm trees, boughs of leafy trees and wood from the willow trees and construct booths (Sukkot) for themselves and sleep under the night sky – the land thus rests in peace. This lasts for 7 days and is a reminder to the Israelites when God delivered them out of Egypt, brought them to rest and made them camp out – they were at peace because of God's miraculous deliverance (**Leviticus 23:40-43, Deuteronomy 16:13, Nehemiah 8:14-18**). In Gideon's case, the feast is reinvented, as follows:

- As his judgeship begins to degenerate into a quest for vengeance (**Judges 8:19**), Gideon refers to his slaughter of the Midianites as “a grape harvest” (**Judges 8:2**).
- Rather than gathering branches, Gideon fetches briars from the wilderness and flays the elders of Succoth with them (**Judges 8:16**).
- He felt his brothers had betrayed him by not cooperating with him.
- He kills the men of the city for their betrayal.
- This behavior is brutal and unnecessary and leaves a noticeable mark on Israel.

There is Deliverance but self-inflicted violence, murder and betrayal in the process.

Some important points about Gideon:

- The presence of Divine miracles in your life doesn't automatically mean the presence of Divine fruit.
- The grace of Jesus instructs and grows our character but doesn't make excuses for our lack of it.
- One of the greatest evidences of INWARD transformation is your OUTWARD treatment of people.

What can we learn from this?

- The way in which God relates to Israel is how He relates to us.
- The study of Israel brings us into the knowledge of God.
- The Lord has brought salvation from Israel, so the study of Israel in the Scriptures gives wisdom, insight and understanding of how the Lord relates to man in light of His anointed Son.