

## Standing on the Threshold of Judges.

An Overview.

Sunday evening, November 28, 2010.

### I. The nature of the period of the Judges.

#### A. It was a long anticipated day.

1. Some six centuries had gone by since the Lord had first promised to Abraham that his seed would become the size of a nation, and they would inherit this land.
2. The period they spend in Egypt, particularly the latter period, they must have clung to this hope. It is entirely possible that the Lord used the period of oppression to awaken the hope of a return to Canaan once again in them. As long as life was good and prosperous for them in Egypt they would have had little occasion to long and pray for a return to Canaan.
3. The period in the wilderness they had been restless pilgrims and sojourners without a real home, and longing for the day that the glory-cloud of the Lord's presence should guide them into the promised land.
4. The period under Joshua that they had spent in the Promised Land, had been marked by the conflicts of conquering sufficient land for them to dwell in.
5. Each tribe was now settled in its own territory, and was in a position to subdue remaining Canaanite peoples in their territory.  
Joshua and the remaining elders who had outlived him now had passed away, and Israel's tribes could plan for the future and carve out their own manner of life.

#### B. It was also a day that held great promise.

1. Israel had been chosen by God to be His special people; the people in whom He would reveal His glory to the world.
2. In that context great and precious promises had been given to them; promises of great success and prosperity; promises of being the "the head" and not "the tail;" of being "above only, and "not beneath" among the community of nations of that time.
3. The realization of these promises hinged only on their remaining loyal to the Lord's covenant with them. This is not to be confused with a life of sinless obedience, for the covenant had provisions for the covering of their many sins. Rather it was a life lived in humble recognition of their own many shortcomings and the Lord's gracious provision for those shortcomings in the tabernacle and temple services.

Is not that the nature of our lives as Christians still?

#### C. Finally it was a day that was never to be.

1. It was never to be because of Israel's failure to cling to the Lord's covenant with them. Therefore the promised blessings were realized only in a very limited fashion, and very short in duration.
2. The book of Judges chronicles this failure for us which spans the time from Joshua and his fellow elders until the period of the kings.

## II. A two-fold failure.

The book of Judges chronicles a twofold failure for us on the part of God's people.

- A. Judges 1. chronicles a partial conquest of the land for us.
  - 1. The Lord's plan for Israel involved a gradual conquest of the land; they were to grow into the land and not conquer it all at once lest the wild beasts of the land would get the upper hand. Deuteronomy 7:22.
  - 2. The Lord's plan always involved a complete conquest however. Israel lost sight of this mandate and grew content with a job half done.
- B. Judges 2 describes the consequences of this failure. Israel accepted the Baal worship of the Canaanites. At first no doubt they accepted it as a form of worship alongside the worship of Jehovah, but as these things develop, before too long it took the place of the worship of Jehovah. With that they lost the favor of the Lord.

Application:

"Coddling the Canaanites" is still the major cause of failure in the Christian life; the major cause of losing the Lord's favor, and becoming strangers to His presence in our lives. It is the major cause of incurring His discipline in our lives.

The Lord has raised up the cross of Christ in our lives in order that the Canaanites of our "old man" might be crucified with Him; Canaanites of our own strength and wisdom; our plans and our pleasures; our rights and expectations; Canaanites who will fight for their right to dwell in the land. All too quickly we embrace them as our friends, we defend them, fight for them, and we do what we can to rescue them from the cross of Christ.

## III. The oppressions.

Chapters 3-16 chronicle the oppression the Lord brought to bear on His people as a result of their disobedience.

- A. They involve entirely small local nations. There was no large world empire that was interested in the land of Canaan as there would be later when Israel went into captivity.
- B. Six successive oppressions are described: The Mesopotamians, Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites, Ammonites, and the Philistines. Of all these the Philistines were the most serious.
- C. Each of these oppressions involved a cycle beginning with Israel's apostasy, the Lord bringing an oppressor, Israel cries for deliverance, and the Lord raising up a deliverer in the form of a judge.

## IV. Two sad episodes.

Chapters 17-21 record two events which may be taken as illustrations of the kinds of situations and sins went on in this period. We should not look upon these two events however as meaning that these were the only kinds of things that went on. The Lord had a God-fearing people during this time as well, and the ministry of the tabernacle persisted among them throughout this time. These two events illustrate a key phrase in Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in their own eyes."