

Lectures on the Book of Judges

Introductory Note

William Kelly

Introductory Note The Book of Judges has a specially instructive value, which is an important spiritual help for our times. The history records repeated instances of Jehovah's deliverances of His chosen people after their successive acts of disobedience to His precepts and departure from His worship. Though that dispensation differs from the present, God as God is unchanged; amid the brazen-faced apostasy and the spiritual lassitude of Christendom the faithful may count that God will as of old raise up some Gideon or Barak and give a season of reviving to those who wait upon His name, as indeed in His gracious sovereignty He has often done at intervals in the past history of His church on earth. The Book of Judges encourages the hope that He will do so again before its final days. In the period covered by the Book of Judges, the nation of Israel had taken possession of the land of their promised inheritance, and were nominally under the direct government of Jehovah. Moses, their leader in the wilderness, and Joshua, their leader and director in the division of the land, had both died. They had been chosen and fitted by God to be the spiritual guides and instructors of His newly-redeemed people. But the judgments and statutes given through Moses for the people to "observe to do in the land" (Deut. 12: 1) were preserved in writing among them for their obedience, while Joshua before his death gathered all the tribes to Shechem (Joshua 24) and in view of his immediate departure exacted from them the solemn covenanted promise, "The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey" (ver. 24). But during the period of the judges Israel persistently disobeyed the commandments of Jehovah, and broke their own promise to Joshua. They forgot what God had done at the Red Sea and Rephidim, at the Jordan and at Jericho. They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, and served the gods of the surrounding nations. The tabernacle at Shiloh and its worship they despised. The code of righteous laws provided by Moses for an orderly national life acceptable to God they disregarded. Lawlessness prevailed throughout the twelve tribes. In short, the moral condition of Israel, redeemed to be in the eyes of all other nations a model of righteous government, is summed up in the final sentence of this Book: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21: 25). Because of this unfaithfulness and disobedience, the hand of Jehovah was time and again laid heavily upon them, as He had warned them through the mouth

of Moses (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). They were spoiled and enslaved by the neighbouring nations whose idols they served. When they groaned under their chastisement, the Lord had pity upon them and raised up judges who delivered them from their enemies. But they "ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way". So soon as the judge was dead, they fell into yet deeper depths of corruption. In Judges 2: 11-16, the incorrigible evil of the children of Israel in the land of their inheritance is expressly stated, and the Book goes on to show the many merciful and marvellous interventions by Jehovah to preserve the people from the righteous results of their own folly and wickedness and from the fate of the Amorites whom they had displaced in the land. The Book of Judges deals with the history of Israel from the death of Joshua to the raising up of Samuel the prophet. There are three distinct sections: (1) a preface; (2) the account of the judges; (3) an appendix. (1) The preface (Judges 1: 1 - 3: 6) shows the degeneracy of Israel and their lapse into idolatry after the death of Joshua. (2) The principal narrative of the Book (Judges 3: 7- Judges 16: 31) relates to the twelve judges whom God raised up to deliver the tribes from their servitudes to foreign nations and to give them periods of rest from the oppression brought upon themselves by their wilfulness and idolatry. (3) The appendix (Judges 17-21) records two infamous incidents of idolatry and immorality among the Israelites in illustration of the debasements to which departure from God leads. The grave events named in the appendix are not placed chronologically. Probably, they actually occurred nearer to the death of Joshua than the death of Samson (Judges 16). The main features of the Book of Judges are indicated and expounded in the reprint which follows of the two Lectures by the late William Kelly. They were intended to help and to stimulate readers to further study of this Book in search of still further enlightenment. It is hoped that by the blessing of God this laudable object may be achieved. W. J. Hocking, June, 1945. First Lecture: Judges 1 - 8