

Lectures on the Book of Judges

Judges 2 — Bochim and the Pattern of Failure

William Kelly

But Judges 2 shows us another thing, a strange and very striking change. "The angel of Jehovah," it is said, "came up from Gilgal to Bochim." There was a deep significance here. Why should the angel of Jehovah come up from Gilgal? We have seen already what Gilgal was. Oh that we knew it better for our own souls! But this at least we have learnt from the word of God, that it was the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. It was the place where flesh came under the execution of the sentence of death. Nor was this all. For it was the place in which the host was regularly encamped; and thence it marched out to conquer at the bidding of Jehovah, and thither it returned again. Mortification of the flesh is the true place of power in the Spirit, and this is what Gilgal means. It was where Israel was reminded of the judgment of God on self, on man's nature, on that which is unclean, and only fit therefore to be cut off and cast away. There God led them back, and thence they came out in divine strength. But the angel of Jehovah now finds himself in a place as characteristic of the book of Judges as Gilgal was of Joshua. It is the place of tears. Not to know sorrow when the people of God have slighted Him and declined is not to know where His Spirit dwells. Hardness of feeling, never according to God, is most of all opposed to Him when the people have failed to meet His glory, when they have been unfaithful as a whole. The angel comes then from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, "I have made you go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the angel of Jehovah spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto Jehovah"; and then in the middle of this same chapter (11-13), after the people had thus humbled themselves before God, we find that they turned away again. "They forsook Jehovah," it is said, "and served Baal and Ashtaroth." Their grief was but passing. "And the anger of Jehovah was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies

round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies." It was not merely now that there was a check. It was not that Israel had a passing humiliation. For Jehovah delivered them up expressly into the hands of their enemies; not that He did not love them, not that He would not work all for good, but that He must have the people in the truth of their state before He would prove Himself in the truth of His own grace. "Whithersoever they went out, the hand of Jehovah was against them for evil, as Jehovah had said, and as Jehovah had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless Jehovah raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of Jehovah; but they did not so. And when Jehovah raised them up judges" — that is, when they were brought down to this great distress, Jehovah appeared for them in showing them suited mercy — "Jehovah was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented Jehovah because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them." But they would not hearken to their judges; "and it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods." If the children of Israel would abandon Jehovah to serve idols, they are themselves given up by Jehovah to serve idolaters. It is so with us. If we sin, this measures and defines our chastisement; and so grace works repentance when we turn and cry to the Lord in our distress.