

“Things Written Aforetime”

God’s Man

During the biblical period between Joshua and the Kings of Israel, several “saviors” appeared to rescue the people from the oppression they brought on themselves by their unfaithfulness. The pattern of the repeated apostasies becomes almost monotonous to the reader, but the great variety of personalities to be seen in the Savior-Judges relieves the monotony tremendously. What greater diversification of characters can be found than those of Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson?

We first find Gideon practicing a passive resistance to the oppressors raiding his country (Judges 6:11). He has practically no confidence in himself as a leader of his tribe (6:15), and makes his first attack on the prevalent idolatry of the time secretly in the darkness of night (6:27). From such a meek beginning, he emerges as the bold leader who can cooperate magnificently with God’s purposes, in order to gain a signal victory over Israel’s enemies. He shows his strength of character in his diplomacy toward the men of Ephraim (8:1-3), in his indignation toward the men of Succoth and Penuel (8:4-17), and in his refusal to accept the clamor to make him king over Israel (8:22-23).

Jephthah’s origins set him at a great disadvantage. The son of a prostitute, he was denied a share in the inheritance his siblings received from their father, and was driven away into a foreign land (11:1-3). He becomes, however, a reputable soldier who is urgently courted by the men of his home country to be their chief to lead them in their defense against the invading Ammonites (11:4-11). His base birth is forgotten when he exhibits a strong commitment toward his oath to God, and in the godly character of his only daughter (11:29-40).

Samson, on the other hand, was dedicated to the service of God before he was born (13:2-7). In spite of this auspicious beginning, he followed a path of error and blunder over a long span of years to a spectacular self-inflicted death. He sought marriage with a Philistine woman, contrary to the Law of Moses (14:2), he consorted with harlots (16:1), he violated his sacred vow (16:16-17), all of which causes him to be seen in a very bad light. In spite of this unsavory reputation, God is by his side throughout, ordering his mighty acts of destruction, and succoring him (14:19, 15:14-20, 16:28-30)

All of these were God’s men, and are enrolled in the Hall of Fame of the faithful, the 11th chapter of Hebrews.

Diversification of characters is also seen in the men who were to second Jesus in His work. The Peter who wavers in inconsistency (Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75; Galatians 2:9-13) is later the Peter who is chosen by the Holy Spirit to say, “Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, you shall never stumble...” (2 Peter 1:10). The John who, with his brother, earns the

nickname Boanerges, meaning "Sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), and who is ready to call down fire on inhospitable Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56), is also the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23), and the one who writes, "...if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

And, most wonderful of all, the Saul who "breathed threatening and slaughter" against the church (Acts 9:1) somehow exhibits to Christ that there is under this violent cover a Paul who, after he becomes a Christian, can wish himself "anathema from Christ" for the sake of his unconverted kinsmen (Romans 9:3). He is the sophisticated, educated "Hebrew of Hebrews," who squelches his "excellency of speech" before the Corinthians, showing rather "weakness...fear...and much trembling," so that their "faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

God's man is not an assembly line product. He is an individualist. He has his faults, and his strengths. He might be "on fire" or simply "warm." He might be in the "early Peter" stage, or the "late John" stage. He does not fit a pattern, except that he loves God, and that he serves Him to the best of his ability. Let no servant of God disparage himself because he is not as effective as some prominent leader or evangelist. Paul says, "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another. And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us..." (Romans 12:5-6). Again, he writes, "...if a man thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each man prove his own work, and then shall he have his glorying in regard of himself alone, and not of his neighbor" (Galatians 6:3-4).