

“Things Written Aforetime”

Seeds of Apostasy

Some of the most interesting reading in the Old Testament is to be found in the book of Judges. It is the record of the “ups and downs” of Israel in the period after they settled in the land of Canaan. The prologue of the book, however, reveals the moral of the story. The Holy Spirit guided the ancient writer to declare the reasons for the wavering fortunes of the people of God. Especially in chapters 2 and 3 we can read of these causes of apostasy.

The first cause was the toleration of evil influences in their midst. God had commanded them to drive out the Canaanites, and had said, “...Ye shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.” but, they did not heed his command, fully, and God expressed His disappointment at their failure. He asked, “Why have you done this?” In the end, God 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” (Judges 2:1-3).

The Christian cannot presume that he is stronger than the Israelites in this matter. If he tolerates the presence of evil influences, he is as likely to fall under that influence as they did. Paul said, after listing a long catalogue of sins, “Be not partakers with them; for you were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord; walk as children of light...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:3-11). The church at Ephesus would not tolerate evil men, but tried them and found them false” (Revelation 2:2). However, the church at Pergamum had in their midst some who held the teaching of Balaam and others who held with the Nicolaitans, and were told to “repent” of such sins (Revelation 2:14-16). Toleration of evil influences displeases God and Christ.

The second seed of apostasy was sown, when they failed to teach the next generation. While Joshua lived, the people of God served Jehovah. They even served Him “all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of Jehovah that He had wrought for Israel.” However, when these men died, and their generation passed away, “there arose another generation after them, that knew not Jehovah, nor yet the work which he had wrought for Israel” (Judges 2:6-10). We must not let such a thing happen in our generation. We must follow the rule of David, when he pleaded with God, “Forsake me not, until I have declared thy strength unto the next generation, thy might to every one that is to come” (Psalm 71:18). Prophecy, also, must be fulfilled, for it is said of Christ, “A seed shall serve Him; it shall be told of the Lord unto the next generation. They shall come and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done it” (Psalm 22:30-31). Therefore, it is fitting

for parents to “nurture (children) in the chastening and admonition of the Lord,” so that apostasy may not come (Ephesians 6:4).

Israel’s third fault in the period of the Judges was that they failed to give proper and lasting respect to the representatives of God’s Word. The inspired writer says, “They hearkened not unto their judges...they turned aside quickly out of the way...when the judge was dead, they turned back, and dealt more corruptly than their fathers...they ceased not from their doings, nor from their stubborn way” (Judges 2:16-19). Apostasy comes today, because of this identical reason. Even the apostle Paul had to devote chapter after chapter of his writings to call men back to their devotion to apostolic authority. He says, “though we or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). He invited men to be “imitators” of him, and to “mark them that so walk even as you have us for an example” (Philippians 3:17).

The final mark of the repetitious downfalls of Israel is revealed in the statement, “...the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites...and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons and served their gods” (Judges 3:5-6). This is another evidence of their indifference to the authority of God’s word. The practice of marriage with the heathen idolatrous nations directly violated the command of God to Israel in Deuteronomy 7:3-4. These marriages led the people of God into the worship of idols, and prepared them for an outpouring of God’s wrath.

In the same spirit, God reasons with Christians, “And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? For we are a temple of the living God, even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, ‘Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to men sons and daughters,’ says the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1).

A spirit that tolerates the presence of evil influences, or fails to build up the next generation in spiritual strength, or fails to give proper respect to the word, or does not maintain the spiritual separation God has required, shall surely fall into apostasy. The consequences of such a fall are unthinkable, and the evidence of the certainty of those consequences is seen in the suffering visited upon Israel by God, when they fell. For us, the fiery “second death” now yawns wide to receive apostates into everlasting destruction. Who would not avoid this, if he could? If you would avoid it, then take a lesson from the book of Judges, and make your election more sure.