

PROPHETS & JUDGES

IN THE PROMISED LAND

“I have felt to urge upon all the necessity of searching the Scriptures for themselves that they may know what is truth, and may discern more clearly the compassion and love of God. Yet there is need of carefulness and earnest prayer in the study of the Bible, that none may fall into error by a misconception of its teachings.” {1888 Materials, p. 806}

WEEK 1 - THE REUBENITES & PHINEHAS

I. A Praiseworthy Example

1. After the conquest of Canaan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad went back to their homes on the far side of the Jordan. What was Joshua's fear as they left?

2. As soon as they got back, they erected an altar. Why did they do that?

II. Joshua's Farewell Address

1. What was Israel's danger in making alliances with idolaters or showing the least respect toward their gods? What should we learn from this?

2. What is one of our greatest dangers as Adventists today? Why?

3. When it comes to friendship and marriage, what is the result of following the feelings of our hearts?

4. How do many young people show that they are out of their minds?

5. What are our idols today? How should we serve God?

A Praiseworthy Example**May 12, 1881**

After Joshua had executed the divine sentence upon Achan, and had thus turned away from Israel the wrath of God, he was commanded to marshal all the men of war and again advance against Ai. The armies of Heaven now fought for Israel, and their enemies were put to flight. {1.1}

Mindful that their only hope was in obedience to God, Joshua now assembled all the people as Moses had commanded, and rehearsed to them the blessings which would follow their obedience to the law, and the curses that would fall upon them should they disregard it. Then he repeated before them the law of ten commandments, and also all the statutes and precepts which Moses had recorded. Again Joshua led Israel forth to battle with their enemies. The Lord wrought mightily for his people, and their armies pressed forward, gaining fresh courage with every victory. {1.2}

Seven years after their entrance into the promised land the whole congregation assembled, and the sacred tabernacle, which had been so long borne with them in their journeyings, was permanently set up at Shiloh. The land was now divided among the several tribes, and the conquest went on with renewed vigor, until "Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war." The glorious promises which God had made to Israel had been fulfilled. "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." {1.3}

Joshua now summoned the men of war who had chosen their inheritance on the east side of Jordan, and commended them for their courage and fidelity. They had fully kept their pledge to Moses, having shared all the conflicts of their brethren, and now they were at liberty to return to their families and their homes. {1.4}

As these tribes were to dwell at a distance from the tabernacle, Joshua feared that they might lose their interest in its services and thus be led to depart from God. With deep solicitude he exhorted them: "Take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." {1.5}

When these tribes had returned to their possessions, they united to erect a large altar near the place where the Israelites had miraculously crossed the river. This altar was not designed for sacrifice or worship, but simply as a witness that, although separated by the river, they were of the same faith as their brethren on the other side, and were entitled to equal privileges in the tabernacle at Shiloh and the services there performed. {1.6}

Although those who engaged in erecting this altar were actuated by the most worthy motives, yet it threatened to cause serious difficulty between them and their brethren across the Jordan; for the latter, hearing what had been done, supposed that this altar was designed to take the place of the tabernacle at Shiloh,

and that it would thus lead the people away from the true faith and bring the wrath of God upon the whole nation. {1.7}

The congregation of Israel became excited and indignant, and determined to make war upon the offenders at once. But men of caution suggested the better plan of sending a representative from each tribe to require an explanation of their motive in erecting this altar. Phinehas the high priest, and ten princes, one from each tribe, were sent. They considered the guilt of their brethren already proved, and met them with sharp rebuke. They accused them of rebelling against the Lord, and bade them remember how the wrath of God had been visited upon Israel for joining themselves to Baal-Peor. Notwithstanding the terrible judgments upon the guilty on that occasion, many were still cherishing the same sins, and Phinehas and his companions feared that their brethren, being surrounded by the worshipers of this idol, might again be led to partake of their iniquity. {1.8}

The Lord had positively commanded that no sacrifice should be offered except at the door of the tabernacle. In behalf of all Israel, Phinehas stated to the children of Gad and Reuben that if they were unwilling to abide in that land without an altar for sacrifice and worship, they would be welcomed to a share in the possessions and privileges of their brethren on the other side. Again he warned them not to depart from God. Achan and his whole family had perished because they transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and for that one man's sin, all the congregation of Israel had suffered. What, then, would be the dire result if that large company should be disobedient to God? {1.9}

The Reubenites and their associates courteously permitted Phinehas to finish his discourse before attempting to make their defense. Then they replied to his accusation in a manner which not only does them the highest credit, but teaches a forcible lesson of Christian forbearance. They expressed no anger or resentment at the ungrounded suspicions and sharp rebukes of their brethren; but in the most sincere and solemn manner they declared their innocence, and appealed to the Lord, who knew their hearts, to testify against them if they were at fault, declaring that if guilty of the sin attributed to them, their lives would justly be forfeited. {1.10}

Then they proceeded to explain their motives and intentions in the building of the altar. They had feared that in future years their children might be excluded from the tabernacle by their brethren on the other side, as having no part in Israel. Then this altar, erected after the pattern of the altar of the Lord at Shiloh, would be a witness that its builders were also worshipers of the living God. {1.11}

The ambassadors readily accepted this candid explanation and expressed great joy that the hearts of their brethren were still true to the God of Jacob. The tidings were immediately carried back to the congregation of Israel, and all thoughts of war were dismissed, and the people united in heartfelt rejoicing and praise to God. {1.12}

Had the suspected tribes stood upon their dignity and answered their accusers in a defiant manner, war would have been the result, and many lives must

have been sacrificed. But their willingness to explain, their forbearance and courtesy, settled everything without a rupture. {1.13}

Upon their altar the children of Gad and Reuben now placed an inscription pointing out the purpose for which it was erected, and they said, "It shall be a witness between us that the Lord is God." Thus they sought to prevent future misunderstanding concerning their religious faith and their connection with Israel, and to remove anything which might be a source of stumbling to their brethren. {1.14}

The difficulties and misunderstandings that still arise among the people of God are often similar in their nature and results to those that threatened to prove so disastrous to Israel. The ten tribes were filled with fear lest the people whom God had accepted as his own, should become divided in interest and worship, hence their promptness in rebuking at once the supposed defection of their brethren. Yet in that very effort to maintain the honor of God and the purity of Israel, we see what serious and even fatal results might have followed from a simple misunderstanding. {1.15}

Men who were honestly seeking to promote the cause of true religion were misjudged and severely reprimanded. The wisdom manifested in their course under these trying circumstances is worthy of imitation. What great evils might be averted if such a course were followed by the members of all our churches. An individual may be unjustly suspected or censured by his brethren, but he should not for this reason yield to anger, or cherish a desire for retaliation. Such an occasion furnishes an opportunity for the development of the precious grace of meekness and forbearance. {1.16}

Care should be exercised by all Christians, to shun the two extremes, of laxness in dealing with sin on the one hand, and harsh judgment and groundless suspicion on the other. The Israelites who manifested so much zeal against the men of Gad and Reuben remembered how, in Achan's case, God had rebuked the lack of vigilance to discover the sins existing among them. Then they resolved to act promptly and earnestly in the future; but in seeking to do this they went to the opposite extreme. Instead of meeting their brethren with censure, they should first have made courteous inquiry to learn all the facts in the case. {1.17}

There are still many who are called to endure false accusation. Like the men of Israel, they can afford to be calm and considerate, because they are in the right. They should remember with gratitude that God is acquainted with all that is misunderstood and misinterpreted by men, and they may safely leave all in his hands. He will as surely vindicate the cause of those who put their trust in him, as he searched out the hidden guilt of Achan. {1.18}

How much of evil would be averted, if all, when falsely accused, would avoid recrimination, and in its stead employ mild, conciliating words. And at the same time, those who in their zeal to oppose sin have indulged unjust suspicions, should ever seek to take the most favorable view of their brethren, and should rejoice when they are found guiltless. {1.19}

The great diversity of religious faith, and the alienation of feeling existing among professed Christians, are serious hindrances to the progress of the gos-

pel. Happy will it be for God's people when they shall be able to unite zeal and firmness with meekness and forbearance. As religious controversies are usually conducted, they are productive of more harm than good. In many cases there is manifested so little Christian humility and forbearance that the unbeliever is confirmed in his doubts and prejudices. Sinners are gratified to see the differences and animosities existing among the professed followers of Christ. Many of the unconverted point to these wrongs to excuse their own neglect. {1.20}

It is the will of God that union and harmony should exist among his people. Our Saviour prayed that his disciples might be one, as he is one with the Father. It should be our constant aim to reach this state of unity; but to do this we are not to sacrifice one principle of truth. It is through obedience to the truth that we are to be sanctified; for while Jesus prayed that his followers might be one, he prayed also, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." We are exhorted to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. This is the evidence of our discipleship. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another;" and conversely, our Saviour desired that his disciples might be one, that the world might know that the Father had sent him. What a thought! that the love and unity among Christians are presented as proof of our Saviour's divine mission to the world. {1.21}

Joshua's Farewell Address

May 19, 1881

Under the leadership of Joshua, the Israelites as a nation maintained their allegiance to God, and his blessing attended them. Among the wooded hills and fertile valleys of the promised land, doubly attractive after the long desert wanderings, the chosen tribes dwelt safely; and the years passed on, peaceful and prosperous. {2.1}

As Joshua felt the infirmities of age stealing upon him, and realized that his labors must soon cease, he assembled the elders, the judges, and the officers of Israel, that he might communicate to them his last warnings and admonitions. The people looked upon the form of their veteran general, who had led them on from victory to victory, and they were ready to ascribe to him the honor of placing them in possession of that good land. But, like his great predecessor, Joshua showed them that their enemies had been conquered because the Lord had fought for Israel, and that God alone should have all the glory. {2.2}

Although the Canaanites had been subdued, they still possessed a considerable portion of the land promised to Israel; and Joshua exhorted his people not to settle down at ease, and forget the Lord's command to utterly dispossess these idolatrous nations. Lest the Israelites should be disheartened, he assured them that if they would be true to God, his presence and power would attend them in their future conflicts as in the past. He earnestly sought to inspire their hearts with faith and courage. "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left." {2.3}

He repeated the instructions given by Moses, that they were to form no allegiance with the idolatrous nations that God had appointed to utter destruction.

They were forbidden to manifest the least respect for the gods of the heathen, to take oath by their names, or to join in their worship in any manner. They were warned that familiarity with idolatry would remove their abhorrence of it, and would expose them to God's displeasure. [2.4]

We are in as great danger from contact with infidelity as were the Israelites from intercourse with idolaters. The productions of genius and talent too often conceal the deadly poison. Under an attractive guise, themes are presented and thoughts expressed that attract, interest, and corrupt the mind and heart. Thus, in our Christian land, piety wanes, and skepticism and ungodliness are triumphant.

[2.5]

The Israelites were exhorted to make the Lord first in their thoughts and affections, and to cleave unto him as their source of strength. "For the Lord hath driven out from before you great nations and strong; but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day." Joshua reiterated the words of Moses: "One man of you shall chase a thousand; for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you." [2.6]

He warned the people that if they should in any manner unite with the remnant of the heathen nations still among them, and contract marriages with them, the protecting care of God would surely be removed from Israel, and those very nations would be the instruments of their punishment. "They shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you." [2.7]

Joshua declared to the people that his work among them was done; for he was soon to die. He appealed to themselves as witnesses that God had faithfully fulfilled his promises to them. "And ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." He assured them that as the Lord had fulfilled his promises, so would he fulfill his threatenings. If they were disobedient to his requirements, he would destroy them, as he had destroyed their enemies. [2.8]

The Lord has not changed. His character is the same today as in the days of Joshua. He is true, merciful, compassionate, faithful in the performance of his word, both in promises and threatenings. One of the greatest dangers that besets the people of God today, is that of association with the ungodly; especially in uniting themselves in marriage with unbelievers. With many, the love for the human eclipses the love for the divine. They take the first step in backsliding by venturing to disregard the Lord's express command; and complete apostasy is too often the result. It has ever proved a dangerous thing for men to carry out their own will in opposition to the requirements of God. Yet it is a hard lesson for men to learn that God means what he says. [2.9]

As a rule, those who choose for their friends and companions, persons who reject Christ and trample upon God's law, eventually become of the same mind and spirit. We should ever feel a deep interest in the salvation of the impenitent, and should manifest toward them a spirit of kindness and courtesy; but we can safely choose for our friends only those who are the friends of God. [2.10]

Those who make the word of God their rule of life are hated by the world. The ungodly are not willing to have their consciences aroused; and the silent example of Christ's true followers is a constant reproof. There are many professed Christians who partake of the spirit of the world, and love its friendship. But none need be deceived by their example; for the word of truth declares that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Those who take human feeling and human reasoning for their guide, will as surely separate from the wisdom of God, as did ancient Israel when they forsook the Lord to serve Baal and Ashtaroth.

{2.11}

Once more, before his final removal from the people of his care, Joshua assembled the chosen tribes to speak to them the words of God. He rehearsed before them their own history and the history of their fathers from the days of Abraham. He did not conceal their errors and mistakes; and with earnestness and gratitude he dwelt upon the dealings of God with them. He reminded them that it was not their own strength or valor which had given them the land of Canaan. God himself had said, "I have given you a land for which ye did not labor, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them. Of the vineyards and olive-yards which ye planted not, do you eat." {2.12}

In view of all that God had done for them, Joshua exhorted the people, "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord." The human mind is naturally inclined to dwell upon the things which are seen and heard, and to neglect the things which are unseen. The Lord had done marvelous things for his people in the manifesting of his power as the only true and living God; yet many had been led astray by the Satanic delusion that God might be represented by material objects, the works of men's hands. By the contemplation of these things, their minds were diverted from God. {2.13}

Among the multitudes that came up out of Egypt were many who had been worshipers of idols; and such is the power of habit that the practice was secretly continued, to some extent, even after the settlement in Canaan. Joshua was sensible of this evil among the Israelites, and he clearly perceived the dangers that would result. He earnestly desired to see a thorough reformation among the Hebrew host. He knew that unless the people took a decided stand to serve the Lord with all their hearts, they would continue to separate themselves farther and farther from him. Then would the Lord remove his protecting care, and suffer them to be driven out and scattered, by the very people whom he had commanded them to destroy. {2.14}

Said Joshua, "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua endeavored to show the people that God's requirements were just and merciful. He would lead them to serve him, not by compulsion, but willingly. Love to God is the very foundation of pure and undefiled religion. To engage in his service as an unpleasant

task, merely from hope of reward or fear of punishment, would bring no sweet peace, no assurance of God's favor. [2.15]

While a portion of the Hebrew host were spiritual worshipers, many were mere formalists; no zeal or earnestness characterized their service. Some were idolaters at heart, who would be ashamed to acknowledge themselves as such. Joshua urged them to consider in all its bearings the important matter which he had set before them, and to decide if they really desired to live as did the idolatrous nations around them. If it seemed evil to them to serve the Lord, if his requirements seemed a grievous exaction, he bade them that day choose whom they would serve—the idols worshiped by their fathers from whom Abraham was called out, or the gods of the Amorites, “in whose land ye dwell.” [2.16]

In these last words was a keen rebuke to the idolatry of Israel. The gods of the heathen had no power to bestow peace or prosperity. Their worshipers had ascribed to them praise and honor for all the bounties bestowed by the mercy and love of God. Hence the Lord had removed from them his blessing, and had left them to the mercies of the gods in whom they trusted. That wicked people had been destroyed; and the good land which they once possessed, had been given to God's people. Then what suicidal folly for Israel to choose the gods for worshiping whom the Amorites had been destroyed! [2.17]

When a man comes to his right mind, he begins to reflect upon his relation to his Maker. It is moral madness to prefer the praise of men to the favor of God, the rewards of iniquity to the treasures of Heaven, the husks of sin to the spiritual food God gives his children. Yet how many who display intelligence and shrewdness in worldly things, manifest an utter disregard to those things that pertain to their eternal interest. [2.18]

Joshua assured the Israelites that of themselves they could not serve the Lord. The natural heart is a battle-field, upon which there is a constant warfare; conscience seeking to hold sway, and passion also struggling for the victory. God would not grant them his favor and support while they persisted in transgression. If they honored him, he would honor them. If they should forsake him, and serve strange gods, he would forsake them. As God is a being of perfect truth and holiness, it was impossible for them to serve him and yet continue in sin; for he could not unite with iniquity. Only by thorough repentance and reformation of life, could they hope to secure the divine favor. [2.19]

God's plan for the salvation of men, is perfect in every particular. If we will faithfully perform our allotted part, all will be well with us. It is man's apostasy that causes discord, and brings wretchedness and ruin. God never uses his power to oppress the creatures of his hand. He never requires more than man is able to perform; never punishes his disobedient children more than is necessary to bring them to repentance; or to deter others from following their example. Rebellion against God is inexcusable. [2.20]

The judgments of God quickly following upon transgression, his counsels and reproofs, the manifestations of his love and mercy, and the oft-repeated exhibitions of his power—all were a part of God's plan to preserve his people from sin, to make them pure and holy, that he might be their strength and shield and their

exceeding great reward. But the persistent transgressions of the Israelites, their readiness to depart from God, and their forgetfulness of his mercies, showed that many had chosen to be servants of sin, rather than children of the Most High.

{2.21}

God had created them, Christ had redeemed them. From the house of bondage their cry of anguish went up to the throne of God, and he put forth his arm to rescue them; for their sake, bringing desolation upon the whole land of Egypt. He had granted them high honors. He had made them his peculiar people, and had showered upon them unnumbered blessings. If they would obey him, he would make them a mighty nation—a praise and excellence in all the earth. God designed to magnify his name through his chosen people, by showing the vast difference existing between the righteous and the wicked, the servants of God and the worshippers of idols. {2.22}

Joshua sought to show his people the inconsistency of their course of backsliding. He wished them to feel that the time had come to make a decided change, to put away every vestige of idolatry, and to turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart. He endeavored to impress upon their minds the fact that open apostasy would not be more offensive to God than hypocrisy, and a lifeless form of worship. {2.23}

If the favor of God was worth anything, it was worth everything. Thus Joshua had decided; and after weighing the whole matter, he had determined to serve him with full purpose of heart. And more than this, he would endeavor to induce his family to pursue the same course. {2.24}

God said of Abraham, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the ways of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” The promises of God to Abraham and his posterity, and through Christ to the nations of the earth, may appear to have been unconditional. But such was not the case. Whether Abraham would share in their fulfillment, was determined by the course which he pursued. The Lord approved his faithfulness in the government of his household. Abraham firmly restrained evil, and endeavored by precept and example to promote justice and godliness among them. Thus he worked in harmony with God, faithfully performing his part in the great plan. {2.25}

Our dangers are similar to those which threatened the prosperity of ancient Israel. The oft-repeated warnings against idolatry addressed to the Hebrew host, are no less applicable to us. Everything which leads the affections away from God is an idol, and betrays us into sin. If we serve God willingly and joyfully, preferring his service to the service of sin and Satan; if we choose him, openly and boldly turning from all the attractions and vanities of the world, we shall enjoy his blessing in this life, and shall dwell forever in his presence in the future life. {2.26}

The Lord our God is a jealous God. He is just and holy He will not be trifled with. He reads a deceptive heart. He abhors a double mind. He hates lukewarmness. We cannot serve God and mammon, for they are antagonistic. {2.27}

Answer Hints

Section 1: | 1) 1.5 | 2) 1.6 | 3) 1.7, 1.8, 1.17 | 4) 1.8 | 5) 1.10 | 6) 1.13 | 7) 1.16, 1.18 | 8) 1.21 |

Section 2: | 1) 2.4, 2.5 | 2) 2.9, 2.10 | 3) 2.11 | 4) 2.18 | 5) 2.26 |

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