

PROPHETS & JUDGES

IN THE PROMISED LAND

“Satan can present a counterfeit so closely resembling the truth that it deceives those who are willing to be deceived, who desire to shun the self-denial and sacrifice demanded by the truth; but it is impossible for him to hold under his power one soul who honestly desires, at whatever cost, to know the truth. . . . ‘If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.’ ” (Great Controversy, p. 528)

WEEK 6 - JUDGMENT AND MERCY

I. A Backsliding People

1. What two traits characterize men that God entrusts with important responsibilities?

2. The work we are to do is great, but we are weak and insignificant. How can we gain the power, efficiency, qualification, and greatness to do the work?

2. What hope do sinners have?

3. Were the Israelites serving idols ignorantly—thinking that these gods could actually help them? How do you think this applies to us today?

4. In the judgment, what will happen to those who today are making the same mistake as Israel?

5. Why is it so critical that we do not play with sin or trifle with our present privileges and opportunities?

6. How did Israel feel as they realized their true condition, and how they were judged by God?

III. A Lesson for Mothers

1. Israel mingled with the Philistines and united with them in commerce, pleasure, and even worship until they seemed to be identified with them in spirit and interest. What did these “friends” do next? What should we learn from this?

2. It seemed to the few truehearted Israelites that there was apparently no response to their prayers. But what was reality? What was the problem?

3. How much does the mother affect the character of her unborn child?

A Backsliding People**August 11, 1881**

After the death of Abimelech, the usurper, the Lord raised up Tola to judge Israel. His peaceful reign presented a happy contrast to the stormy scenes through which the nation had been passing. It was not his work to lead armies to battle and to achieve victories over the enemies of Israel, as the former rulers had done; but his influence effected a closer union among the people, and established the government upon a firmer basis. He restored order, law, and justice. {1.1}

Unlike the proud and envious Abimelech, Tola's great desire was, not to secure position or honor for himself, but to improve the condition of his people. A man of deep humility, he felt that he could accomplish no great work, but he determined to perform with faithfulness his duty to God and to the people. He highly valued the privilege of divine worship, and chose to dwell near the tabernacle, that he might oftener attend upon the services there performed. {1.2}

Devotion and humility have ever characterized the men with whom God has entrusted important responsibilities in his work. The divine call to Moses in the desert found him distrustful of self. He realized his unfitness for the position to which God had called him; but having accepted the trust, he became a polished instrument in the hand of God to accomplish the greatest work ever committed to mortals. {1.3}

Had Moses trusted to his own strength and wisdom, and eagerly accepted the great charge, he would have evinced his entire unfitness for such a work. The fact that a man feels his own weakness, is at least some evidence that he realizes the magnitude of the work appointed him, and this gives room for hope that he will make God his counselor and his strength. Such a person will move no farther nor faster than he knows God is leading him. {1.4}

A man will gain power and efficiency as he accepts the responsibilities which God places upon him, and with his whole soul seeks to qualify himself to bear them aright. However humble his position or limited his ability, that individual will attain true greatness who cheerfully responds to the call of duty, and, trusting to the divine strength, seeks to perform his work with fidelity. He will feel that he has a sacred commission to battle against wrong, to strengthen the right, to elevate, comfort, and bless his fellow-men. Indolence, selfishness, and love of worldly approbation must yield to this high and holy calling. {1.5}

Engaged in such a work, the weak man will become strong; the timid, brave; the irresolute, firm and decided. Each sees the importance of his position and his course, inasmuch as Heaven has chosen him to do a special work for the King of kings. Such men will leave the world better for their having lived in it. Their influence is exerted to elevate, to purify, and to ennoble all with whom they come in contact, and thus they help to prepare their fellow-men for the heavenly courts. {1.6}

Tola governed Israel twenty-three years, and was succeeded by Jair. This ruler also feared the Lord and endeavored to maintain his worship among the people. In conducting the affairs of the government he was assisted by his sons, who acted as magistrates, and went from place to place to administer justice. {1.7}

To some extent, during the latter part of Jair's reign, and more generally after his death, the Israelites again relapsed into idolatry. The sacred record states, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not him." {1.8}

The divine judgments followed close upon the transgressions of Israel. The Ammonites made war upon them in the east, and the Philistines in the west. Other nations, also, united with these in the oppression of Israel, until they seemed again to be shut in by relentless foes. In the days of prosperity, God's people had forsaken him, and now he seemed to have forsaken them, and they knew not which way to turn for help. Thus was again fulfilled the word of the Lord by the mouth of Joshua, that the heathen nations, if not promptly destroyed, would prove to Israel as snares for their feet, and as thorns in their eyes. {1.9}

When the sins of a nation are punished, the innocent often suffer with the guilty. Among apostate Israel, the Lord still had faithful servants. These labored to show Israel their transgressions, and that all their troubles were but the results of their apostasy. But the words of warning seemed for a time to fall unheeded.

{1.10}

We repeat what has been so often said before, that among the people of God today are dangers similar to those that well-nigh destroyed Israel. The command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," was spoken from Sinai for every soul that should live upon the earth. We can no more free ourselves from the claims of God's law than we can hide from his all-seeing eye. Its precepts reached every case, and its claims rest upon all the children of men to the close of time. {1.11}

Idolatry has separated the people of God from him; he has not the first place in their thoughts and affections. Professed Christians fail to realize their accountability to God. They forget that he is ever present, to assert his supreme authority, and to take cognizance of all their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. {1.12}

Satan once presented all the attractions of the world to Christ, to allure him from the path of duty. Having failed in this, the arch-deceiver tries the same device with the followers of Jesus, and meets with much better success. Thus Satan receives the devotion which God claims. How many employ all the Creator's gifts merely to glorify themselves. How many set their affections upon their worldly possessions, or seek above all else the applause of men. How many choose the atmosphere of vanity and worldliness, rather than that of sobriety, purity, and godliness. They are so far from God that they cannot discern the true value of eternal things. And there are some who glory in their unbelief, making this an excuse for their defects of character. Unbelief is the idol which they worship. They willfully grope in darkness constantly diffusing mist and fog to shadow their own path and the path of others. But still the voice from Sinai sounds in our ears, addressing this class no less than all others, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." {1.13}

Many who profess to be the disciples of Jesus seem as indifferent and careless in their religious life, as though no responsibility rested upon them to deny self and bear the cross. They do not realize their duty, by personal example and earnest effort to help others to follow in the same path. God would be to us the very help we need, if we would make him first, and last, and best, in all the purposes and events of life. Every plan devised should bear the high signet of Heaven, rather than the seal of worldly commendation. {1.14}

The reason why so many are walking in darkness is that they pursue a path which leads directly away from God. Christ came to give the world an example of a pure and perfect life. He sacrificed himself for the joy of saving the lost. Whoever follows Christ will work the works of Christ. Pride and selfishness will not be cherished, every sinful indulgence will be put away, the soul temple will be cleansed from every idolatrous shrine. Until this shall take place, we cannot claim to be free from Israel's great sin of idolatry. {1.15}

Judgment and Mercy

August 18, 1881

Exposed to the power of their enemies, the children of Israel at last realized the perils of their situation, and the futility of all their efforts against the oppressor. Then they began to seek help from Him whom they had so forsaken and insulted. They saw in some measure, how far they had separated themselves from the only One who could help them. "And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim." {2.1}

But infinite wisdom saw that they sorrowed because of the consequences of their sin—the suffering which it had brought upon themselves—rather than because they had offended God. The Lord answered them, through one of his faithful prophets: {2.2}

"Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods; wherefore I will deliver you no more." {2.3}

Thus the Lord presented before them his goodness, his long suffering, his pity for their distress, and the wonderful deliverances which he had wrought for them again and again. Notwithstanding all his love and care, they had once more forsaken him, and had sinned more grievously than ever before, choosing the service of idols, instead of the worship of the living God. Now, in their distress, he bade them, "Go and cry unto the Gods which ye have chosen. Let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." {2.4}

But there was hope for Israel as soon as they began sincerely to repent and humbly cry unto God. They had been led to see what would be their condition, should the Lord leave them to be delivered by the gods in whom they trusted. They would be subdued by the very nations that in God's strength they had once conquered. Had Israel preserved their connection with God, they would have derived honor, dignity, and power from this relationship. {2.5}

Allied to the King of kings, the Lord of life and glory, the vilest sinner may become a partaker of the divine nature, and an heir of eternal riches. "To them

gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” Oh, what condescension, what amazing love, to make fallen man a member of the royal family, a child of the Heavenly King! How can the world’s Redeemer look upon those who stubbornly refuse to receive the gifts of a Saviour’s love, or who, having professedly accepted him, cast aside as worthless trifles the honor and dignity offered them as his followers! {2.6}

Multitudes turn with contempt from the pleadings of divine grace and infinite love, to satisfy their desire for forbidden pleasures which prove as the apples of Sodom, beautiful without, but ashes within. Israel had no love for the holy character of God, and they rejected and despised his friendship. Scorning the Creator, they adored the creature; and when, in their distress, they sought unto the long-insulted Jehovah, he pointed them to the gods of their choice, and bade them cry to these deities for help. {2.7}

The Israelites well knew that their idols were powerless to save or to destroy. They knew that the heathen worship was contrary to reason and sound judgment. But they had gradually departed from God, and had indulged in sin until their moral perceptions were dulled, and they were led astray by Satan. {2.8}

As we ponder the solemn words of warning addressed to Israel, we are in imagination brought before the great white throne, where in the presence of the assembled universe, every man will be judged according to the deeds done in the body. Then will be seen the true value of a Christian life and character. There must they render an account who have devoted their God-given talents of time, of means, or of intellect, to serving the gods of this world. The searching eye of Jehovah will rest upon all; and that voice which amid the thunders of Sinai spake to man, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”—that voice will answer the sinner’s imploring cry for pardon, “Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen. Let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.” {2.9}

None then to pity the folly of those who have despised and forsaken God. None to relieve their distress. They have forsaken their true and loving Friend, to follow the path of convenience and worldly pleasure. They intended at some time to return to God. But the world, with its follies and deceptions, absorbs the attention. Frivolous amusements, pride of dress, indulgence of appetite, harden the heart and benumb the conscience, so that the voice of truth is not heard. Duty is a despised word. Things of infinite value are lightly esteemed, until the heart loses all desire to sacrifice for Him who has given so much for man. But in the reaping time they must gather the crop sown. {2.10}

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you: then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore they shall eat of the fruit

of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.” [2.11]

God speaks to us today, in the warnings, counsels, and reproofs given to ancient Israel. If we depart from him, our condemnation will be greater than theirs; for we have their experience as a warning, and all the instruction which God has given since their time. Many and varied are the idols which we cherish; idols that engross the mind and harden the heart, so that sacred things are not rightly valued. Oh that the lessons given to ancient Israel might so impress our hearts and affect our lives that we would fully turn from idols, to serve the living God. [2.12]

We must not trifle with our present privileges and opportunities, and expect that when lost they will be restored whenever we desire. It is impossible to abuse the powers with which our Creator has endowed us, and yet find them clear and vigorous, to call to our aid whenever we wish to devote them to a nobler, better purpose. The chains of habit, like ropes of steel, are not easily broken. Then how careful should we be to cherish only those traits which we would have to form the texture of character. [2.13]

The children of Israel had forfeited all right to expect help from God, and they had begun to feel this. They knew not where to turn for human help, and God had apparently forsaken them. His words thrilled their guilty souls with the anguish of remorse. They knew that they deserved to suffer the divine judgment, and to this they were willing to submit, if they might hope once more to be forgiven and restored to the favor of God. [2.14]

“And the children of Israel said unto the Lord, We have sinned; do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord; and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.” [2.15]

Oh, the long-suffering mercy and condescension of our God! The Lord had been trying his people. When they humbled themselves before him, and repented with sincerity of soul, he heard their prayers, and at once began to deliver Israel. [2.16]

A Lesson for Mothers

September 15, 1881

While Israel was sorely harassed by the children of Ammon on the east, and the Philistines on the west, the Lord hearkened to the prayers of his people, and began to work for their deliverance. After eighteen years of oppression, they made war against the Ammonites, and effectually destroyed their power. But a backsliding and idolatrous people soon forgot the lesson which divine wisdom had so often sought to teach them. As they continued to depart from God, he permitted them still to be oppressed by their powerful enemies, the Philistines. [3.1]

For a period of forty years the children of Israel were constantly harassed, and at times completely subjugated, by this cruel and warlike nation. They had mingled with these idolaters, united with them in commerce, in pleasure, and even in worship, until they seemed to be identified with them in spirit and interest. Then

these professed friends of Israel became their bitterest enemies, and sought by every means to accomplish their destruction. {3.2}

There is still, as with ancient Israel, a constant tendency among the professed people of God to depart from the Lord's instructions, and to imitate the customs and practices of worldlings. The people of the world have given themselves to the service of Satan; and their hearts are opposed to the religion of Jesus Christ. They may profess to acknowledge him as their Redeemer, but they have the same hostility as did the heathen of old, to that religion which calls for self-denial and self-sacrifice. The spirit of the world today is the same that prompted the rejection and crucifixion of the Prince of Life; the same that has consigned his followers to imprisonment, exile, and death. The Christianity which will yield to the influence of the world, and conform itself to their principles and customs, is looked upon with favor by men who are the enemies of God. But when the necessity for holiness of heart and life is presented, then the world feels that its rights are endangered. When the church rebukes fashionable follies, demoralizing amusements, extravagance, and self-indulgence; when Christianity is spiritual, positive, earnest, and aggressive—then the opposition of the world will be excited. {3.3}

Our Saviour plainly taught that there could be no harmony between his followers and the world. "Marvel not that the world hate you. Ye know that it hated me before it hated you." The world will love its own. Those who value the things which it values, will enjoy its friendship. It is the spirit of the world that separates us from God. It is the love of those things which he has condemned that brings his displeasure upon us. As in olden times, the Lord still sends his messengers with words of warning and reproof. He makes it our duty to hear, to understand, and to obey. There are evils among the people of God that call for reform. The light of the present age, the experience of the church in ages past, the teachings of the sacred word for this time—all bid us go forward. {3.4}

There were still in Israel true-hearted ones whose souls were filled with anguish because of the condition of their people. Their prayers of confession, penitence, and faith, went up without ceasing before God. He was not indifferent to their cries, but while there was apparently no response, his providence was preparing for them help suited to their condition. There was not to be found in all Israel a man through whom the Lord could work for the deliverance of his people. The erroneous education given to children, indulgence of appetite, and conformity to the practices of heathenism, had greatly lessened both physical and moral power. {3.5}

Godly fathers and mothers looked with gloomy forebodings to the future. Many a mother had secretly cherished the hope that she might give to God and to Israel a son who should deliver his people from the oppressor's power. But as parents saw their children coming up with perverted appetites and uncontrolled passions, the inquiry arose, What will the end be? What part will these youth and children act in the great drama of life? In the hearts of many mothers, hope battled against fear; but in other hearts reigned only discouragement and despair. What could the mother do to avert the threatened evils? How could she

train her children for God? How banish the nameless terror which oppressed her soul? "Spare us, O God, spare us!" was the oft-repeated prayer. "Let not thy people perish; let us not see our children a prey of the enemy."^{3.6}

At this time the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, an Israelite of the tribe of Dan, and informed her that she should have a son; and in view of this, he gave her special instruction concerning her own habits, and also for the treatment of her child. "Now therefore, beware, I pray thee, and drink neither wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing." He also directed that no razor should come upon the head of the child, for he was to be consecrated to God as a Nazarite from his birth, and through him the Lord would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.^{3.7}

The woman sought her husband, and after describing the heavenly visitant, she repeated the message of the angel. Then, fearful that they should make some mistake in the important work committed to them, the husband prayed earnestly, "Let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born."^{3.8}

In answer to this petition, the angel again appeared, and Manoah's anxious inquiry was, "How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" The previous instruction was repeated—"Of all that I said unto the woman, let her beware. She may not eat of anything that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. All that I command her let her observe."^{3.9}

Manoah and his wife knew not that the One thus addressing them was Jesus Christ. They looked upon him as the Lord's messenger, but whether a prophet or an angel, they were at a loss to determine. Wishing to manifest hospitality toward their guest, they entreated him to remain while they should prepare for him a kid. But in their ignorance of his character, they knew not whether to offer it for a burnt-offering or to place it before him as food.^{3.10}

The angel answered, "Although thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread; and if thou wilt offer a burnt-offering, thou must offer it unto the Lord." Feeling assured, now, that his visitor was a prophet, Manoah said, "What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honor."^{3.11}

The answer was, "Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is secret?" Perceiving the divine character of his guest, Manoah "took a kid, with a meat-offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord; and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on." Fire came from the rock, and consumed the sacrifice, and as the flame went up toward heaven, "the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground." There could be no further question as to the character of their visitor. They knew that they had looked upon the Holy One, who, veiling his glory in the cloudy pillar, had been the guide and helper of Israel in the desert.^{3.12}

Amazement, awe, and terror filled Manoah's heart, and he could only exclaim, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" But his companion in that solemn hour possessed more faith than he. She reminded him that the Lord had

been pleased to accept their sacrifice, and had promised them a son who should begin to deliver Israel. This was an evidence of favor instead of wrath. Had the Lord purposed to destroy them, he would not have wrought this miracle, nor given them a promise which, were they to perish, must fail of fulfillment. {3.13}

The words uttered by the angel convey an important truth. Our Creator himself declares that the mother's habits prior to the birth of her child will affect its character and destiny. In speaking to this one mother, the Lord spoke to all the anxious, sorrowing mothers of that time, and to all the mothers of succeeding generations. Yes, every mother may now understand her duty. She may know that the character of her children will depend vastly more upon her own habits before their birth, and her personal efforts after their birth, than upon external advantages or disadvantages. {3.14}

If the mother would be a fit teacher for her children, she must form habits of self-denial and self-control before their birth. She imparts to them her own qualities of blood, her own strong or weak traits of character. If her ways are established in God, if she heeds the admonitions which he gives, she will do her part to give right character, right temper, and right appetites, to her offspring.

{3.15}

Said the angel, "Let her beware;" that is, be prepared to resist temptation, and stand firmly at her post. Let principle control her appetites and her passions. Of every mother it may be said, "Let her beware." There is something to shun, a necessity of guarding herself if she would seek eminence for the gift of God in her child. If she is unstable, double-minded, unprincipled, she will in most cases cause the future ruin of her child. Her fixed principles of action, her unbending purpose to adhere to right rules, as the wisdom of God dictates, will give these same traits of character to her child. The Lord has spoken, and his words are not to be disregarded. {3.16}

The divine command was very explicit, prohibiting the use of the fruit of the vine. Every drop of stimulant taken by the mother as a gratification of the appetite, endangers the physical, mental, and moral health of her offspring, and is a direct sin against her Creator. The accumulated misery and wickedness in our world exists in consequence of disregarding the express commands of God. The restrictions are given by the One who made man, who instituted the laws controlling his physical being, and who knows what is for his good. Dare any regard the lesson with indifference? {3.17}

Answer Hints

Section 1: | 1) 1.3–1.4 | 2) 1.5–1.6 | 3) 1.9, 1.11–1.13 | 4) 1.14 | 5) 1.15 |

Section 2: | 1) 2.2, 2.3–2.4 | 2) 2.6 | 3) 2.8 | 4) 2.9 | 5) 2.13 | 6) 2.14 |

Section 3: | 1) 3.2, 3.3–3.4 | 2) 3.5 | 3) 3.15–3.16 |

This lesson is from a 13-week (1-quarter) set of Sabbath School lessons for youth and young adults called *Prophets & Judges*, based on a series of articles by Ellen G. White in *The Signs of the Times*, 1881–1882.

Other youth/young adult lessons are available:

- Early Writings (2 quarters)
A look at the messages God gave especially to the SDA church. (Each class member will need a copy of Early Writings.)
- Tidal Waves (1 quarter)
A powerful series on the coming tidal waves of fanaticism. Learn how to recognize fanaticism and avoid becoming part of it.
- Redemption (4 quarters)
Taken from the series of six booklets by Ellen White on the life of Christ which include many insights not in The Desire of Ages.
- Deeper (1 quarter)
Based on the book Deeper by Eugene Prewitt, these Bible studies cover many important topics that must be understood today.

You may order printed copies of the complete set of lessons and teacher answer keys from Young Disciple Ministries.

509-722-4300
www.YoungDisciple.com

Copyright © 2013. All rights reserved.