

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter we have,

- I.** A particular message which God sent to Israel by an angel, and the impression it made upon them (v. 1-5).
- II.** A general idea of the state of Israel during the government of the judges, in which observe,
 - 1.** Their adherence to God while Joshua and the elders lived (v. 6-10).
 - 2.** Their revolt afterwards to idolatry (v. 11-13).
 - 3.** God's displeasure against them, and his judgments upon them for it (v. 14, 15).
 - 4.** His pity towards them, shown in raising them up deliverers (v. 16-18).
 - 5.** Their relapse into idolatry after the judgment was over (v. 17-19).
 - 6.** The full stop God in anger put to their successes (v. 20-23).These are the contents, not only of this chapter, but of the whole book.

~~<OR>~~ JUDGES 2:1-5

AN ANGEL REBUKES THE ISRAELITES

It was the privilege of Israel that they had not only a law in general sent them from heaven, once for all, to direct them into and keep them in the way of happiness, but that they had particular messages sent them from heaven, as there was occasion, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, when at any time they turned aside out of that way. Besides the written word which they had before them to read, they often *heard a word behind them, saying, This is the way,* ~~<231>~~ Isaiah 30:21. Here begins that way of God's dealing with them. When they would not hear Moses, let it be tried whether they will hear the prophets. In these verses we have a very awakening sermon that was preached to them when they began to cool in their religion.

I. The preacher was an *angel of the Lord* (v. 1), not a prophet, not Phinehas, as the Jews conceit; gospel ministers are indeed called *angels of the churches*, but the Old-Testament prophets are never called angels of the Lord; no doubt this was a messenger we from heaven. Such extraordinary messengers we sometimes find in this book employed in the raising up of the judges that delivered Israel, as Gideon and Samson; and now, to show how various are the good offices they do for God's Israel, here is one sent to preach to them, to prevent their falling into sin and trouble. This extraordinary messenger was sent to command, if possible, the greater regard to the message, and to affect the minds of a people whom nothing seemed to affect but what was sensible. The learned bishop Patrick is clearly of opinion that this was not a created angel, but the Angel of the covenant, the same that appeared to Joshua as *captain of the hosts of the Lord*, who was God himself. Christ himself, says Dr. Lightfoot; who but God and Christ could say, *I made you to go up out of Egypt?* Joshua had lately admonished them to take heed of entangling themselves with the Canaanites, but they regarded not the words of a dying man; the same warning therefore is here brought them by the living God himself, the Son of God appearing as an angel. If they slight his servants, surely they will reverence his Son. This angel of the Lord is said to come up from Gilgal, perhaps not walking on the earth, but flying swiftly, as the angel Gabriel did to Daniel, in the open firmament of heaven; but, whether walking or flying, he seemed to come from Gilgal for a particular reason. Gilgal was long their headquarters after they came into Canaan, many signal favours they had there received from God, and there the covenant of circumcision was renewed (³⁰⁰⁶Micah 6:5), of all which it was designed they should be reminded by his coming from Gilgal. The remembrance of *what we have received and heard* will prepare us for a warning to hold fast, ^{418D}Revelation 3:2, 3.

II. The persons to whom this sermon was preached were *all the children of Israel*, v. 4. A great congregation for a great preacher! They were assembled either for war, each tribe sending in its forces for some great expedition, or rather for worship, and then the place of their meeting must be Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, at which they were all to come together three times a year. When we attend upon God in instituted ordinances we may expect to hear from him, and to receive his gifts at his own gates. The place is called *Bochim* (v. 1), because it gained that name

upon this occasion. All Israel needed the reproof and warning here given, and therefore it is spoken to them all.

III. The sermon itself is short, but very close. God here tells them plainly,

1. What he had done for them, v. 1. He had brought them out of Egypt, a land of slavery and toil, into Canaan, a land of rest, liberty, and plenty. The miseries of the one served as a foil to the felicities of the other. God had herein been kind to them, true to the oath sworn to their fathers, had given such proofs of his power as left them inexcusable if they distrusted it, and such engagements to his service as left them inexcusable if they deserted it.

2. What he had promised them: *I said, I will never break my covenant with you.* When he took them to be his peculiar people, it was not with any design to cast them off again, or to change them for another people at his pleasure; let them but be faithful to him, and they should find him unchangeably constant to them. He told them plainly that the covenant he entered into with them should never break, unless it broke on their side.

3. What were his just and reasonable expectations from them (v. 2): that being taken into covenant with God they should make no league with the Canaanites, who were both his enemies and theirs, — that having set up his altar they should throw down their altars, lest they should be a temptation to them to serve their gods. Could any thing be demanded more easy?

4. How they had in this very thing, which he had most insisted on, disobeyed him: “But you have not in so small a matter obeyed my voice.” In contempt of their covenant with God, and their confederacy with each other in that covenant, they made leagues of friendship with the idolatrous devoted Canaanites, and connived at their altars, though they stood in competition with God's. “*Why have you done this?* What account can you give of this perverseness of yours at the bar of right reason? What apology can you make for yourselves, or what excuse can you offer?” Those that throw off their communion with God, and have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, know not what they do now, and will have nothing to say for themselves in the day of account shortly.

5. How they must expect to smart by and by for this their folly, v. 3. Their tolerating the Canaanites among them would,

(1.) Put a period to their victories: “*You* will not drive them out,” says God, “and therefore *I* will not;” thus their sin was made their punishment.

Thus those who indulge their lusts and corruptions, which they should mortify, forfeit the grace of God, and it is justly withdrawn from them. If we will not resist the devil, we cannot expect that God should tread him under our feet.

(2.) It would involve them in continual troubles. “They shall be thorns in your sides to gore you, which way soever you turn, always doing you one mischief or other.” Those deceive themselves who expect advantage by friendship with those that are enemies to God.

(3.) It would (which was worst of all) expose them to constant temptation and draw them to sin. “Their gods” (their *abominations*, so the Chaldee) “will be a snare to you; you will find yourselves wretchedly entangled in an affection to them, and it will be your ruin,” so some read it. Those that approach sin are justly left to themselves to fall into sin and to perish in it. God often makes men's sin their punishment; and thorns and snares are *in the way of the froward*, who will walk contrary to God.

IV. The good success of this sermon is very remarkable: The people *lifted up their voice and wept*, v. 4.

1. The angel had told them of their sins, for which they thus expressed their sorrow: the lifted up their voice in confession of sin, crying out against their own folly and ingratitude, and wept, as those that were both ashamed of themselves and angry at themselves, as having acted so directly contrary both to their reason and to their interest.

2. The angel had threatened them with the judgments of God, of which they thus expressed their dread: they lifted up their voice in prayer to God to turn away his wrath from them, and wept for fear of that wrath. They relented upon this alarm, and their hearts melted within them, and trembled at the word, and not without cause. This was good, and a sign that the word they heard made an impression upon them: it is a wonder sinners can ever read their Bible with dry eyes. But this was not enough; they wept, but we do not find that they reformed, that they went home and destroyed all the remains of idolatry and idolaters among them. Many are melted under the word that harden again before they are cast into a new mould. However, this general weeping,

(1.) Gave a new name to the place (v. 5): they called it *Bochim*, *Weepers*, a good name for our religious assemblies to answer. Had they kept close to

God and their duty, no voice but that of singing would have been heard in their congregation; but by their sin and folly they had made other work for themselves, and now nothing is to be heard but the voice of weeping.

(2.) It gave occasion for a solemn sacrifice: They *sacrificed there unto the Lord*, having (as is supposed) met at Shiloh, where God's altar was. They offered sacrifice to turn away God's wrath, and to obtain his favour, and in token of their dedication of themselves to him, and to him only, making a covenant by this sacrifice. The disease being thus taken in time, and the physic administered working so well, one would have hoped a cure might be effected. But by the sequel of the story it appears to have been too deeply rooted to be wept out.

~~III~~ JUDGES 2:6-23

THE IDOLATRY OF THE ISRAELITES

The beginning of this paragraph is only a repetition of what account we had before of the people's good character during the government of Joshua, and of his death and burial (~~III~~ Joshua 24:29, 30), which comes in here again only to make way for the following account, which this chapter gives, of their degeneracy and apostasy. The angel had foretold that the Canaanites and their idols would be a snare to Israel; now the historian undertakes to show that they were so, and, that this may appear the more clear, he looks back a little, and takes notice,

1. Of their happy settlement in the land of Canaan. Joshua, having distributed this land among them, dismissed them to the quiet and comfortable possession of it (v. 6): *He sent them away*, not only every tribe, but *every man to his inheritance*, no doubt giving them his blessing.
2. Of their continuance in the faith and fear of God's holy name as long as Joshua lived, v. 7. As they went to their possessions with good resolutions to cleave to God, so they persisted for some time in these good resolutions, as long as they had good rulers that set them good examples, gave them good instructions, and reprov'd and restrained the corruptions that crept in among them, and as long as they had fresh in remembrance the great things God did for them when he brought them into Canaan: those that had seen these wonders had so much sense as to believe their own

eyes, and so much reason as to serve that God who had appeared so gloriously on their behalf; but those that followed, because they had not seen, believed not.

3. Of the death and burial of Joshua, which gave a fatal stroke to the interests of religion among the people, v. 8, 9. Yet so much sense they had of their obligations to him that they did him honour at his death, and buried him in *Timnath-heres*; so it is called here, not, as in Joshua, *Timnath-serah*. *Heres* signifies the *sun*, a representation of which, some think, was set upon his sepulchre, and gave name to it, in remembrance of the sun's standing still at his word. So divers of the Jewish writers say; but I much question whether an image of the sun would be allowed to the honour of Joshua at that time, when, by reason of men's general proneness to worship the sun, it would be in danger of being abused to the dishonour of God.

4. Of the rising of a new generation, v. 10. All that generation in a few years wore off, their good instructions and examples died and were buried with them, and there arose another generation of Israelites who had so little sense of religion, and were in so little care about it, that, notwithstanding all the advantages of their education, one might truly say that they knew not the Lord, knew him not aright, knew him not as he had revealed himself, else they would not have forsaken him. They were so entirely devoted to the world, so intent upon the business of it or so indulgent of the flesh in ease and luxury, that they never minded the true God and his holy religion, and so were easily drawn aside to false gods and their abominable superstitions.

And so he comes to give us a general idea of the series of things in Israel during the time of the judges, the same repeated in the same order.

I. The people of Israel forsook the God of Israel, and gave that worship and honour to the dunghill deities of the Canaanites which was due to him alone. *Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and wonder, O earth! Hath a nation, such a nation, so well fed, so well taught, changed its God, such a God, a God of infinite power, unspotted purity, inexhaustible goodness, and so very jealous of a competitor, for stocks and stones that could do neither good nor evil?* ^{<421>} Jeremiah 2:11, 12. Never was there such an instance of folly, ingratitude, and perfidiousness. Observe how it is described here, v. 11-13. In general, *they did evil*, nothing could be more evil, that is, more provoking to God, nor more prejudicial to themselves,

and it was *in the sight of the Lord*; all evil is before him, but he takes special notice of the sin of having any other god. In particular, 1. They *forsook the Lord* (v. 12, and again v. 13); this was one of the two great evils they were guilty of, ²¹²³Jeremiah 2:13. They had been joined to the Lord in covenant, but now they forsook him, as a wife *treacherously departs from her husband*. “They forsook the worship of the Lord,” so the Chaldee: for those that forsake the worship of God do in effect forsake God himself. It aggravated this that he was *the God of their fathers*, so that they were *born in his house*, and therefore bound to serve him; and that he *brought them out of the land of Egypt*, he *loosed their bonds*, and upon that account also they were obliged to serve him.

2. When they forsook the only true God they did not turn atheists, nor were they such fools as to say, *There is no God*; but they followed other gods: so much remained of pure nature as to own a God, yet so much appeared of corrupt nature as to multiply gods, and take up with any, and to follow the fashion, not the rule, in religious worship. Israel had the honour of being a peculiar people and dignified above all others, and yet so false were they to their own privileges that they were fond of the gods *of the people that were round about them*. Baal and Ashtaroth, he-gods and she-gods; they made their court to sun and moon, Jupiter and Juno. *Baalim* signifies *lords*, and *Ashtaroth blessed ones*, both plural, for when they forsook Jehovah, who is one, they had gods many and lords many, as a luxuriant fancy pleased to multiply them. Whatever they took for their gods, they served them and bowed down to them, gave honour to them and begged favours from them.

II. The God of Israel was hereby provoked to anger, and delivered them up into the hand of their enemies, v. 14, 15. He was wroth with them, for he is a jealous God and true to the honour of his own name; and the way he took to punish them for their apostasy was to make those their tormentors whom they yielded to as their tempters. They made themselves as mean and miserable by forsaking God as they would have been great and happy if they had continued faithful to him.

1. The scale of victory turned against them. After they forsook God, whenever they took the sword in hand they were as sure to be beaten as before they had been sure to conquer. Formerly their enemies could not stand before them, but, wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was for them; when they began to cool in their religion, God suspended his favour,

stopped the progress of their successes, and would not drive out their enemies any more (v. 3), only suffered them to keep their ground; but now, when they had quite revolted to idolatry, the war turned directly against them, and they *could not any longer stand before their enemies*. God would rather give the success to those that had never known nor owned him than to those that had done both, but had now deserted him. Wherever they went, they might perceive that God himself had *turned to be their enemy, and fought against them*, ^{<2610>} Isaiah 63:10.

2. The balance of power then turned against them of course. Whoever would might spoil them, whoever would might oppress them. God sold them into the hands of their enemies; not only he delivered them up freely, as we do that which we have sold, but he did it upon a valuable consideration, that he might get himself honour as a jealous God, who would not spare even his own peculiar people when they provoked him. He sold them as insolvent debtors are sold (^{<4185>} Matthew 18:25), by their sufferings to make some sort of reparation to his glory for the injury it sustained by their apostasy. Observe how their punishment,

(1.) Answered what they had done. They served the gods of *the nations that were round about them*, even the meanest, and God made them serve the princes of the nations that were round about them, even the meanest. He that is company for every fool is justly made a fool of by every company.

(2.) How it answered what God has spoken. The hand of heaven was thus turned against them, *as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn* (v. 15), referring to the curse and death set before them in the covenant, with the blessing and life. Those that have found God true to his promises may thence infer that he will be as true to his threatenings.

III. The God of infinite mercy took pity on them in their distresses, though they had brought themselves into them by their own sin and folly, and wrought deliverance for them. Nevertheless, though their trouble was the punishment of their sin and the accomplishment of God's word, yet they were in process of time saved out of their trouble, v. 16-18. Here observe,

1. The inducement of their deliverance. It came purely from God's pity and tender compassion; the reason was fetched from within himself. It is not said, *It repented them because of their iniquities* (for it appears, v. 17, that many of them continued unreformed), but, *It repented the Lord because of*

their groanings; though it is not so much the burden of sin as the burden of affliction that they are said to groan under. It is true they deserved to perish for ever under his curse, yet, this being the day of his patience and our probation, he does not stir up all his wrath. He might in justice have abandoned them, but he could not for pity do it.

2. The instruments of their deliverance. God did not send angels from heaven to rescue them, nor bring in any foreign power to their aid, but raised up judges from among themselves, as there was occasion, men to whom God gave extraordinary qualifications for, and calls to, that special service for which they were designed, which was to reform and deliver Israel, and whose great attempts he crowned with wonderful success: *The Lord was with the judges* when he raised them up, and so they became saviours. Observe,

(1.) In the days of the greatest degeneracy and distress of the church there shall be some whom God will either find or make to redress its grievances and set things to rights.

(2.) God must be acknowledged in the seasonable rising up of useful men for public service. He endues men with wisdom and courage, gives them hearts to act and venture. All that are in any way the blessings of their country must be looked upon as the gifts of God.

(3.) Whom God calls he will own, and give them his presence; whom he raises up he will be with.

(4.) The judges of a land are its saviours.

IV. The degenerate Israelites were not effectually and thoroughly reformed, no, not by their judges, v. 17-19.

1. Even while their judges were with them, and active in the work of reformation, there were those that *would not hearken to their judges*, but at that very time *went a whoring after other gods*, so mad were they upon their idols, and so obstinately *bent to backslide*. They had been espoused to God, but broke the marriage-covenant, and went a whoring after these gods. Idolatry is spiritual adultery, so vile, and base, and perfidious a thing is it, and so hardly are those reclaimed that are addicted to it.

2. Those that in the times of reformation began to amend *yet turned quickly out of the way* again, and became as bad as ever. The way they

turned out of was that which their godly ancestors walked in, and set them out in; but they soon started from under the influence both of their fathers' good example and of their own good education. The wicked children of godly parents do so, and will therefore have a great deal to answer for. However, *when the judge was dead*, they looked upon the dam which checked the stream of their idolatry as removed, and then it flowed down again with so much the more fury, and the next age seemed to be rather the worse for the attempts that had been made towards reformation, v. 19. *They corrupted themselves more than their fathers*, strove to outdo them in multiplying strange gods and inventing profane and impious rites of worship, as it were in contradiction to their reformers. *They ceased not* from, or, as the word is, *they would not let fall*, any of their own doings, grew not ashamed of those idolatrous services that were most odious nor weary of those that were most barbarous, would not so much as diminish one step of their hard and stubborn way. Thus those that have forsaken the good ways of God, which they have once known and professed, commonly grow most daring and desperate in sin, and have their hearts most hardened.

V. God's just resolution hereupon was still to continue the rod over them,

1. Their sin was sparing the Canaanites, and this in contempt and violation of the covenant God had made with them and the commands he had given them, v. 20.

2. Their punishment was that the Canaanites were spared, and so they were beaten with their own rod. They were not all delivered into the hand of Joshua while he lived, v. 23. Our Lord Jesus, though he *spoiled principalities and powers*, yet did not complete his victory at first. *We see not yet all things put under him*; there are remains of Satan's interest in the church, as there were of the Canaanites in the land; but our Joshua lives for ever, and will in the great day perfect his conquest. After Joshua's death, little was done for a long time against the Canaanites: Israel indulged them, and grew familiar with them, and therefore God would not drive them out any more, v. 21. If they will have such inmates as these among them, let them take them, and see what will come of it. God chose their delusions, ~~and~~ Isaiah 66:4. Thus men cherish and indulge their own corrupt appetites and passions, and, instead of mortifying them, make provision for them, and therefore God justly leaves them to themselves under the power of their sins, which will be their ruin. *So shall their doom be; they themselves*

have decided it. These remnants of the Canaanites were left to prove Israel (v. 22), *whether they would keep the way of the Lord or not*; not that God might know them, but that they might know themselves. It was to try,

(1.) Whether they could resist the temptations to idolatry which the Canaanites would lay before them. God had told them they could not, ~~<BIB>~~Deuteronomy 7:4. But they thought they could. “Well,” said God, “I will try you;” and, upon trial, it was found that the tempters' charms were far too strong for them. God has told us how deceitful and desperately wicked our hearts are, but we are not willing to believe it till by making bold with temptation we find it too true by sad experience.

(2.) Whether they would make a good use of the vexations which the remaining natives would give them, and the many troubles they would occasion them, and would thereby be convinced of sin and humbled for it, reformed, and driven to God and their duty, whether by continual alarms from them they would be kept in awe and made afraid of provoking God.