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Introduction

An angel comes to the Israelites at Bochim, and gives them various reproofs, at which they are greatly affected, Judges 2:1-5. They served the Lord during the days of Joshua, and the elders who succeeded him, Judges 2:6, Judges 2:7. Joshua having died, and all that generation, the people revolted from the true God and served idols, Judges 2:8-13. The Lord, being angry, delivered them into the hands of spoilers, and they were greatly distressed, Judges 2:14, Judges 2:15. A general account of the method which God used to reclaim them, by sending them judges whom they frequently disobeyed, Judges 2:16-19. Therefore God left the various nations of the land to plague and punish them, Judges 2:20-23.

Verse 1

An angel of the Lord - In the preceding chapter we have a summary of several things which took place shortly after the death of Joshua; especially during the time in which the elders lived (that is, the men who were contemporary with Joshua, but survived him), and while the people continued faithful to the Lord. In this chapter, and some parts of the following, we have an account of the same people abandoned by their God and reduced to the heaviest calamities, because they had broken their covenant with their Maker. This chapter, and the first eight verses of the next, may be considered as an epitome of the whole book, in which we see, on one hand, the crimes of the Israelites; and on the other, the punishments inflicted on them by the Lord; their repentance, and return to their allegiance; and the long-suffering and mercy of God, shown in pardoning their backslidings, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies. The angel of the Lord, mentioned here, is variously interpreted; some think it was Phinehas, the high priest, which is possible; others, that it was a prophet, sent to the place where they were now assembled, with an extraordinary commission from God, to reprove them for their sins, and to show them the reason why God had not rooted out their enemies from the land; this is the opinion of the Chaldee paraphrast, consequently of the ancient Jews; others think that an angel, properly such, is intended; and several are of opinion that it was the Angel of the Covenant, the Captain of the Lord's host, which had appeared unto Joshua, Judges 5:14, and no less than the Lord Jesus Christ himself. I think it more probable that some extraordinary human messenger is meant, as such messengers, and indeed prophets, apostles, etc., are frequently termed angels, that is, messengers of the Lord. The person here mentioned appears to have been a resident at Gilgal, and to have come to Bochim on this express errand.

I will never break my covenant - Nor did God ever break it. A covenant is never broken but by him who violates the conditions of it: when any of the contracting parties violates any of the conditions, the covenant is then broken, and by that party alone; and the conditions on the other side are null and void.

Verse 3

I will not drive them out from before you - Their transgressions, and breach of the covenant, were the reasons why they were not put in entire possession of the promised land. See note at the end of this chapter, Judges 2:23 (note).

Verse 5

They called the name of that place Bochim - The word בּוֹחִים (bochim) signifies weepings or lamentations; and is translated by the Septuagint ἰσθῆμῶν or ἰσθῆμῶν, bewailings; and it is supposed that the place derived its name from these lamentations of the people. Some think the place itself, where the people were now assembled, was Shiloh, now named Bochim because of the above circumstance. It should be observed, that the angel speaks here in the person of God, by whom he was sent; as the prophets frequently do.

Verse 6

When Joshua had let the people go - The author of this book is giving here a history of the people, from the division of the land by Joshua to the time in which the angel speaks. Joshua divided the land to them by lot; recommended obedience to God, which they solemnly promised: and they continued faithful during his life, and during the lives of those who had been his contemporaries, but who had survived him. When all that generation who had seen the wondrous works of God in their behalf had died, then the succeeding generation, who knew not the Lord - who had not seen his wondrous works - forsook his worship, and worshipped Baalim and Ashtaroth, the gods of the nations among whom they lived, and thus the Lord was provoked to anger; and this was the reason why they were delivered into the hands of their enemies. This is the sum of their history to the time in which the angel delivers his message.

Verse 8

Joshua - died - See the notes on Joshua 24:29, Joshua 24:30.

Verse 11

Served Baalim - The word בָּאִלִּים (baalim) signifies lords. Their false gods they considered supernatural rulers or governors, each having his peculiar district and office; but when they wished to express a particular בָּאֵל (baal), they generally added some particular epithet, as Baal-zephon, Baal-peor, Baal-zehub, Baal-shamayim, etc., as Calmet has well observed. The two former were adored by the Moabites; Baal-zebub by the Ekronites. Baal-berith was honored at Shechem; and Baal-shamayim, the lord or ruler of the heavens, was adored among the Phoenicians, Syrians, Chaldeans, etc. And whenever the word baal is used without an epithet, this is the god that is intended; and probably, among all these people, it meant the sun.

Verse 12

Which brought them out of the land of Egypt - This was one of the highest aggravations of their offense; they forsook the God who brought them out of Egypt; a place in which they endured the most grievous oppression and were subjected to the most degrading servitude, from which they never could have rescued themselves; and they were delivered by such a signal display of the power, justice, and mercy of God, as should never have been forgotten, because the most stupendous that had ever been exhibited. They forsook Him, and served idols as destitute of real being as of influence and power.

Verse 13

Served Baal and Ashtaroth - In a general way, probably, Baal and Ashtaroth mean the sun and moon; but in many cases Ashtaroth seems to have been the same among the Canaanites as Venus was among the Greeks and Romans, and to have been worshipped with the same obscene rites.

Verse 14

The hands of spoilers - Probably marauding parties of the Canaanites, making frequent incursions in their lands, carrying away cattle, spoiling their crops, etc.

Verse 15

The hand of the Lord was against them - The power which before protected them when obedient, was now turned against them because of their disobedience. They not only had not God with them, but they had God against them.

Verse 16

The Lord raised up judges - That is, leaders, generals, and governors, raised up by an especial appointment of the Lord, to deliver them from, and avenge them on, their adversaries. See the preface.

Verse 17

Went a whoring after other gods - Idolatry, or the worship of strange gods, is frequently termed adultery, fornication, and whoredom, in the sacred writings. As many of their idolatrous practices were accompanied with impure rites, the term was not only metaphorically but literally proper.

Verse 18

The Lord was with the judge - God himself was king, and the judge was his representative.

It repented the Lord - He changed his purpose towards them: he purposed to destroy them because of their sin; they repented and turned to him, and he changed this purpose. The purpose was to destroy them if they did not repent; when they did repent, his not destroying them was quite consistent with his purpose.

Verse 19

When the judge was dead - It appears that in general the office of the judge was for life.

Their stubborn way - Their hard or difficult way. Most sinners go through great tribulation, in order to get to eternal perdition; they would have had less pain in their way to heaven.

Verse 20

The anger of the Lord was hot - They were as fuel by their transgressions; and the displeasure of the Lord was as a fire about to kindle and consume that fuel.

Verse 21

I will not henceforth drive out - As a people, they never had personal courage, discipline, or hardihood,

sufficient to stand before their enemies: the advantages they gained were by the peculiar interference of God. This they had while obedient; when they ceased to obey, his strong arm was no longer stretched out in their behalf; therefore their enemies continued to possess the land which God purposed to give them as their inheritance for ever.

Verse 22

That through them I may prove Israel - There appeared to be no other way to induce this people to acknowledge the true God, but by permitting them to fall into straits from which they could not be delivered but by his especial providence. These words are spoken after the manner of men; and the metaphor is taken from the case of a master or father, who distrusts the fidelity or obedience of his servant or son, and places him in such circumstances that, by his good or evil conduct, he may justify his suspicions, or give him proofs of his fidelity.

Verse 23

Without driving them out hastily - Had God expelled all the ancient inhabitants at once, we plainly see, from the subsequent conduct of the people, that they would soon have abandoned his worship, and in their prosperity forgotten their deliverer. He drove out at first as many as were necessary in order to afford the people, as they were then, a sufficiency of room to settle in; as the tribes increased in population, they were to extend themselves to the uttermost of their assigned borders, and expel all the remaining inhabitants. On these accounts God did not expel the aboriginal inhabitants hastily or at once; and thus gave the Israelites time to increase; and by continuing the ancient inhabitants, prevented the land from running into waste, and the wild beasts from multiplying; both of which must have infallibly taken place had God driven out all the old inhabitants at once, before the Israelites were sufficiently numerous to occupy the whole of the land.

These observations are important, as they contain the reason why God did not expel the Canaanites. God gave the Israelites a grant of the whole land, and promised to drive out their enemies from before them if they continued faithful. While they continued faithful, God did continue to fulfill his promise; their borders were enlarged, and their enemies fled before them. When they rebelled against the Lord, he abandoned them, and their enemies prevailed against them. Of this, their frequent lapses and miscarriages, with God's repeated interpositions in their behalf, are ample evidence. One or two solitary instances might not be considered as sufficient proof; but by these numerous instances the fact is established. Each rebellion against God produced a consequent disaster in their affairs; each true humiliation was invariably followed by an especial Divine interposition in their behalf. These afforded continual proof of God's being, providence, and grace. The whole economy is wondrous; and its effects, impressive and convincing. The people were not hastily put in possession of the promised land, because of their infidelity. Can the infidels controvert this statement? If not then their argument against Divine revelation, from "the failure of positive promises and oaths," falls to the ground. They have not only in this, but in all other respects, lost all their props.

"Helpless and prostrate all their system lies

Cursing its fate, and, as it curses, dies."