**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JUDGES-001. A SUMMARY OF ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS AND GOD'S PATIENCE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? 3. Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. 4. And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. 5. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the Lord. 6. And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. 7. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that He did for Israel. 8. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. 9. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. 10. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel."*

*Judges 2:1-10*

The Book of Judges begins a new era, the development of the nation in its land. Chapters i. to iii. 6 contain two summaries: first, of the progress of the conquest; and second, of the history about to be unfolded in the book. The first part of this passage (verses 1-5) belongs to the former, and closes it; the second (verses 6-10) introduces the latter, and contrasts it with the state of things prevailing as long as the soldiers of Joshua lived.

**I.** The Angel of the Lord had appeared to Joshua in Gilgal at the beginning of the war, and issued his orders as Captain of the Lord's host. Now He reappears to ask why his orders had not been carried out, and to announce that victory was no longer to attend Israel's arms. Nothing can be plainer than that the Angel speaks as one in whom the divine name dwells. His reiterated I's are incomprehensible on any other hypothesis than that He is that mysterious person, distinct from and yet one with Jehovah, whom we know as the Word made flesh. His words here are stern. He enumerates the favours which He had showed to Israel, and which should have inspired them to glad obedience. He recalls the conditions on which they had received the land; namely, that they were to enter into no entangling alliances with the remnant of the inhabitants, and especially to have no tolerance for their idolatry. Here we may observe that, according to Joshua's last charge, the extermination of the native peoples was not contemplated, but that there should be no such alliances as would peril Israel's observance of the covenant (Joshua xxiii. 7, 12). He charges them with disobedience, and asks the same question as had been asked of Eve, What is this ye have done? And He declares the punishment about to follow, in the paralysing of Israel's conquering arm by the withdrawal of His conquering might, and in the seductions from the native inhabitants to which they would fall victims.

Note, then, how God's benefits aggravate our disobedience, and how He bases His right to command on them. Further, note how His promises are contingent on our fulfilment of their conditions, and how a covenant which He has sworn that He will never break He does count as non-existent when men break it. Again, observe the sharp arraignment of the faithless, and the forcing of them to bethink themselves of the true character of their deeds, or, if we adopt the Revised Version's rendering, of the unreasonableness of departing from God. No man dare answer when God asks, What hast thou done? No man can answer reasonably when He asks, Why hast thou done it? Once more, note that His servants sin when they allow themselves to be so mixed up with the world that they are in peril of learning its ways and getting a snare to their souls. We have all unconquered Canaanites in our hearts, and amity with them is supreme folly and crying wickedness. Thorough must be our motto. Many times have the conquered overcome their conquerors, as in Rome's conquest of Greece, the Goths conquest of Rome, the Normans conquest of England. Israel was in some respects conquered by Canaanites and other conquered tribes. Let us take care that we are not overcome by our inward foes, whom we fancy we have subdued and can afford to treat leniently.

Again, God punishes our making truce with our spiritual foes by letting the effects of the truce work themselves out. He said to Israel, in effect: If you make alliances with the people of the land, you shall no longer have power to cast them out. The swift rush of the stream of victory shall be stayed. You have chosen to make them your friends, and their friendship shall produce its natural effects, of tempting you to imitation. The increased power of our unsubdued evils is the punishment, as it is the result, of tolerance of them. We wanted to keep them, and dreamed that we could control them. Keep them we shall, control them we cannot. They will master us if we do not expel them. No wonder that the place was named Bochim (Weepers), when such stern words were thundered forth. Tears flow easily; and many a sin is wept for once, and afterwards repeated often. So it was with Israel, as the narrative goes on to tell. Let us take the warning, and give heed to make repentance deep and lasting.

**II.** Verses 6-10 go back to an earlier period than the appearance of the Angel. We do not know how long the survivors of the conquering army lived in sufficient numbers to leaven opinion and practice. We may, however, roughly calculate that the youngest of these would be about twenty when the war began, and that about fifty years would see the end of the host that had crossed Jordan and stormed Jericho. If Joshua was of about the same age as Caleb, he would be about eighty at the beginning of the conquest, and lived thirty years afterwards, so that about twenty years after his death would be the limit of the elders that outlived Joshua.

Verses 6-9 substantially repeat Joshua xxiv. 28-31, and are here inserted to mark not only the connection with the former book, but to indicate the beginning of a new epoch. The facts narrated in this paragraph are but too sadly in accord with the uniform tendencies of our poor weak nature. As long as some strong personality leads a nation or a church, it keeps true to its early fervour. The first generation which has lived through some great epoch, when God's arm has been made bare, retains the impression of His power. But when the leader falls, it is like withdrawing a magnet, and the heap of iron filings tumbles back to the ground inert. Think of the post-Apostolic age of the Church, of Germany in the generation after Luther, not to come nearer home, and we must see that Israel's experience was an all but universal one. It is hard to keep a community even of professing Christians on the high level. No great cause is ever launched which does not lose way as it continues. Having begun in the Spirit, all such are too apt to continue in the flesh. The original impulses wane, friction begins to tell. Custom clogs the wheels. The fiery lava-stream cools and slackens. So it always has been. Therefore God has to change His instruments, and churches need to be shaken up, and sometimes broken up, lest one good, when it has degenerated into custom, should corrupt the world.

But we shall miss the lesson here taught if we do not apply it to tendencies in ourselves, and humbly recognise that we are in danger of being hindered, however well we may have begun to run, and that our only remedy is to renew continually our first-hand vision of the great works of the Lord, and our consecration to His service. It is a poor affair if, like Israel, our devotion to God depends on Joshua's life, or, like King Joash, we do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.