From the Editor's Notebook: The Historical Books

W. Ross Rainey

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Joshua

From the Editor’s Notebook

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In the last five issues of “Food for the Flock” magazine, the editor has presented brief summary studies on the Pentateuch (GENESIS - DEUTERONOMY), the first major section of the Old Testament. It is my purpose in this final issue of 1988 to begin a series of studies which will highlight the historical books of the Old Testament (JOSHUA - ESTHER), its second major section. The twelve books of this section provide us with a basic history of the nation Israel. JOSHUA concerns the entrance into and possession of the land; JUDGES and RUTH center on the early history of the nation; 1 SAMUEL - 2 CHRONICLES focus on the united and divided kingdoms; and EZRA - ESTHER deal with Israel’s exile and return.

Highlights on the Historical Books of the Bible

Joshua: The Book of Possession

Key Word: Possession,

Message: The faithfulness of God declared and demonstrated.

Key Verses: 1:3 — “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.” 21:45 — “There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.”

Introduction

The book of Joshua receives its name from its leading character, around whom all of its history revolves. The Talmud asserts that Joshua wrote all but the last five verses, and that those were added by Phineus (see 24:33). The name Joshua means “Jehovah is salvation,” being equivalent to the name JESUS in the New Testament (Heb. 4:8), of whom Joshua is a splendid type in both name and work. He was born a slave in Egypt, he was 40 years old at the time of the “exodus” (he was one of the spies), he was 80 years old when commissioned by the Lord to succeed Moses, and he was 110 years old at his death. In his Bible history Joshua is seen as a son, slave, soldier, servant, spy, sojourner, saint, saviour and statesman, and though his body has long been dead, his warrior-soul marches on.

It has been rightly said that “God’s best method is a man,” and in every crises which arises God always has a thoroughly prepared human leader to carry out His purposes. Just as Moses was prepared to lead the people out of Egypt, so Joshua was prepared to lead them into Canaan.

Joshua takes an unchallenged place among the great military leaders of the world, and would that all soldiers were like him (cf. Ex. 33:11; Josh. 5:13-15). As to the book itself, it is filled with encouragement, wisdom, instruction, and invigoration for the spiritual soldier, its counterparts in the New Testament being Acts and Ephesians. These two books declare and demonstrate the presence, power and possessions of the Christian in his living Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, while the book

of Joshua typifies the spiritual warfare of the Christian, pulsating with the same divine truths.

Over and over again Joshua's written record reveals the secret of the life that overcomes. The book abounds with action and aggression, disclosing the land to be possessed, conditions for successful operations, deadly enemies, the Jordan crossing, conflicts, conquest, and the division of the land — all being vitally significant and instructive to the mind of the Christian. It is filled with thrilling sights and sounds, the tramp of marching feet and the noise of trumpets, cries and clashes, the din and desolation of war, the sobs of the vanquished and the songs of the victors, revealing throughout God's presence and His wonder-working power.

Commenting on the book of Joshua, W. Graham Scroggie has said: "This book goes on from where DEUTERONOMY leaves off; Joshua completes what Moses commenced. The great event in Moses' life was the passage through the Red Sea, and the great event in Joshua's life was the passage through the Jordan. The one tells of deliverance from bondage, and the other of entrance into blessing. Moses' symbol was the rod, but Joshua's was the spear. The connection between DEUTERONOMY and JOSHUA is instructive. In the one is a prospect, but in the other, an experience. In the one is the vision of faith, and in the other, the venture of faith. In the one is Israel's inheritance, and in the other, Israel's possession. In the one is the call to conflict, and in the other is the clash of conflict. In the one is faith in principle, and in the other, faith in action. In the one is the ideal to become actual, and in the other the ideal becomes actual. In the one is possibility, and in the other realization."1

Outline

1. Introduction (1-2)

2. Entering the Land (3-5)

3. Conquering the Land (6-12)

4. Dividing the Land (13-22)

5. Joshua's Farewell Address (23-24)

In his book entitled, Exploring the Scriptures, John Phillips outlines Joshua's historical account under the following main headings:

1. Claiming the Land (1-5)

2. Conquering the Land (6-11)

3. Colonizing the Land (12-24)2

Notable Notes

The book of Joshua covers a period of some 25 years, occupying the approximate dates of 1451-1425 B.C. It is much more than a record of Israel's conflicts in possessing the land of Canaan, thrilling as that history is. Robert Lee has pointed out that it has a fourfold message:

1. The primary message of the book is the faithfulness of God, being a divine classic on this theme (Josh. 23:14).

2. The book has a definite design — "possessing the land." It is most helpful to compare what the Letter to the Ephesians is to the Church and what the book of Joshua was to Israel. To enjoy God's gifts we must appropriate them (Josh. 1:3; 1 Cor. 10:11).

3. Joshua's written record shows God's horror and hatred of sin. Israel's campaign in Canaan was punitive.

The inhabitants of the land were so sunken in sin, and so given up and over to sins and vices of the most awful description and nature, that God's flaming sword of judgment and justice had to be unsheathed.

4. Israel's military campaign typifies our spiritual conflict. The Canaanites represent our lusts, besetting sins and spiritual enemies, and in the record we discover the secret of being "more than conquerors."3 In the fierce and bloody conflict involving the finest in military strategy, Joshua records the defeat of 31 kings and their tribes, but always in such a way as to remind Israel that their victories were not won by their own strength or power, but by "the Captain of the Lord's hosts" (Josh. 5:15), who fought for them.

As to the punitive aspect of the book, Alvin E. Bell has said: "It is a fearful story of the extermination of nations whose sins had become a stench. Israel was God's instrument for the punishment of the Canaanites, just as later the Assyrian and Roman were his tools in punishing the Jews for their apostasy."4 One especially notable fact concerning the book of Joshua is its introduction to a new method of teaching. Up to this time God had spoken in dreams, visions, or by angelic ministry; now there is the Book of the Law written by Moses, and the Israelites were exhorted to hear and heed God's voice in and through that book (see Josh. 1:8). This arrangement continues to this present hour, only the written record we have now is much larger than the one Joshua possessed, though just as authoritative. How much do we really value it?5 Destructive critics of the Bible have sought to link Joshua with the Pentateuch, but there is no convincing evidence to alter

the conservative position and truth of the words: “And Joshua wrote these words” (Josh. 24:26).

If the second book in the Bible should be called Exodus, then this one should be called Eisodus.

The charge and challenge of Joshua 24:15 is sorely needed in the world today: “… as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

In the book of Joshua the LORD JESUS CHRIST is seen as “THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD’S HOST” (5:14-15).

1 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, pp. 50-51.

2 John Phillips, Exploring the Scriptures, p. 50.

3 Robert Lee, The Outlined Bible.

4 Alvin E. Bell, The Gist of the Bible, p. 25

5 Lee, op. cit.

Judges

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Highlights on the Historical Books of the Bible

Judges: The Book of Rebellion And Restoration

Key Word: Declension.

Message: God’s favor and faithfulness midst failure and faithlessness.

Key Verse: 21:25 — “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Introduction

The book of Judges has been referred to as “a philosophy of history” (see Prov. 14:34), one of its chief lessons being “the folly of forsaking God.” Sin, sorrow, suffering and salvation are key words which sum up the years covered by the book, 300 to 450 years embracing the various estimates of the time period covered. Judges takes its name from the history of the 15 (some say 13, others 14 — the difference being whether or not Shamgar and Eli are counted) judges raised up to rescue and rule Israel, the book serving to record not only the various judges (“saviours,” RV), but the details of seven apostasies, seven servitudes, seven cries to God, and seven deliverances. The book is like a “Dark Ages” of the Old Testament, yet there are many bright spots in it, and it is well to remember that of the time period covered

only 100 years were spent in unfaithfulness to God — and that's 100 too many, of course!

The individual judges were Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah-Barak, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson, Eli and Samuel. W. Graham Scroggie has pointed out that there were three leading types: the Warrior-Judge, as Gideon and Samson; the Priest-Judge, as Eli; and the Prophet-Judge, as Samuel. He has estimated the dates of the book to be 1426-1096 B.C., a period of 330 years.1 It covers the period from Joshua's death to Israel's first king, the main narrative running from 3:7-16:31, 1 Samuel 1-7 and 17-25, with the book of Ruth, being undated episodes of the early days of the judges, inserted between the histories of Samson and Samuel. The human author of the book is uncertain, tradition naming Samuel.

Scroggie has aptly said: "JUDGES is one of the saddest books in the Bible, telling, as it does, of repeated apostasy, chastisement, and mercy. Rebellion, retribution, repentance, and rest, are the dominating notes in this minor music. JOSHUA treats of the heavenlies, but JUDGES of the earthlies; the one is of the Spirit, and the other is of the flesh. In the one is progress, and in the other, decline: in the one, faith, and in the other, unbelief: in the one freedom, and in the other bondage. JUDGES teaches us, on the one hand, not to presume, and on the other hand, not to despair."2 The book itself is not a connected history, but a collection of outstanding incidents, recording outstanding examples of the power of faith in God.

Outline

1. Partial Victory (1:1-3:4)

2. Periodic Victory (3:5-16:31)

3. Prevented Victory (17:1-21:25)

Or, as John Phillips has outlined the major thrusts of Judges:3

1. Israel's Wars (1:1-2:5)

2. Israel's Woes (2:6-16:31)

3. Israel's Ways (17-21)

Notable Notes

Alvin E. Bell has given the gist of the book of Judges as follows:

1. "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord" (2:11; 3:7, 12; etc.)

2. "And the Lord sold them into the hands of their enemies round about" (2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7).

3. "And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer who delivered them" (3:9, 15).4 Israel failed to exterminate her enemies in the land, the result being that as a nation she degenerated to the level of the heathen around them. The same thing may be traced in the life of Lot, but as God was gracious to Lot, so also was He gracious to Israel in the days of the Judges.

There are a number of notable points worthy of special attention in Judges:

1. Unlike other books, Judges had a double commencement (cf. 1:1-2 with 2:6-9). God's people are first seen in dependence and then in declension.

2. It records one of the greatest battle songs in the world (5).

3. It contains the first record in history of the emergence of a woman as the leader of a nation (4).

4. It contains the oldest known parable in the world (9:8-15).

5. There are seven apostasies —seven servitudes — seven cries to God — and seven deliverances.

6. The book has historical value in its link with Joshua (1:1-3:6), its history of the Judges (3:7-16:31), and its appendix which reveals the terrible spiritual condition and declension of the times (17-21).

7. It is a revelation of the perpetual proneness of the human heart to wander away from God, yet at the same time manifesting God's grace in pursuing and restoring His backslidden people.

In the book of Judges we see the "cause, course and curse" (G. Campbell Morgan) of spiritual deterioration.

How did Israel's spiritual deterioration begin? In all probability it began with one man, or a small group of men, Eric W. Hayden having made the following pertinent observation:

"It is astonishing to study the history of the church and to see how nearly all errors and heresies began with one person, then the rest followed. One man, 'Judge' Rutherford—result: the Jehovah's Witnesses; one man, William Miller—result: Seventh Day Adventism; one man, Joseph Smith — result: Mormonism; one woman, Mary Baker Eddy — result: Christian Science; one man, Austin Sparkes result: the Honor Oak Fellowship; one man, Frank Buchman — result: the Oxford Group or

Moral Rearmament. And to a lesser degree we can see this in some of our churches. One man or woman becomes so keen (almost fanatical) about a certain subsidiary society of the church and immediately a group attach themselves about this person and a whole number are missing from the important services of the church. Sometimes there is a real gain from closing down all church organizations except the prayer meeting and the Bible school and making a fresh start. Anarchy is so contagious."5 In the book of Judges the LORD JESUS CHRIST is seen as the "MESSENGER OF JEHOVAH."

1 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, P54.

2 Ibid., p. 55.

3 John Phillips, Exploring the Scriptures, pp. 55-56.

4 Alvin E. Bell, The Gist of the Bible, p. 27.

5 Eric W. Hayden, Preaching Through the Bible, p. 43.

Ruth

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Ruth: The Book of Rest Through Redemption

Key words: Rest (1:9, 3:1) and Redeem (4:4, 6).

Message: Rest through redemption and union.

Key Verse: “Then she said, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day” (3:18).

Introduction

Of the book of Ruth, W. Graham Scroggie has helpfully said: “This is one of the only two books of the Bible which bear the name of a woman, and in many respects they present remarkable contrasts. The one is of a Gentile woman, Ruth, who was brought into the midst of Jews, among whom she henceforth lives her life; and the other is of a Jewish woman, Esther, who is taken into the midst of Gentiles, where, with equal fidelity and grace, she plays the part ordained for her by God. RUTH is a lovely pastoral idyll, the tale of a friendship between two women, and the grand climax up to which all is working is the birth of a baby. After reading JUDGES xvii.-xxi., RUTH is like a lovely lily in a stagnant pool. Here, instead of unfaithfulness, is loyalty, and instead of immorality, is purity. Here, instead of battlefields are harvest fields, and instead of the warriors shout is the

harvester's song."1 F. B. Meyer has said of this Bible gem: 'The story gives a graphic and admirable picture of the simplicity and beauty of the home life of those early years; and it teaches us that we need never despair of our life, for in ways we know not of, God is bringing good out of evil, and sunshine from the dark and cloudy sky."2 The human author of the book is unknown, but it is evident that it was written when the rule of the Judges had ended on the introduction of the monarchy (1:1), and after the birth of David (4:22). In view of these things, the author may well have been Samuel. The book covers a period of ten years (1:4).

Dr. Samuel Johnson, the great literary authority of the 18th century, once read it to an enthralled crowd at the London Club, a pastoral which he said he had lately met with, and which they imagined had just been composed. When the members of the club were loud in their praises of its simple and pathetic beauty, he disclosed to them that it was only the story of Ruth which he had read to them from a book most of them despised—the Bible.

The book of Ruth serves as a sort of appendix to Judges, but is quite in contrast to it, being much like an oasis in a desert. It is the only instance in the Bible in which an entire book is devoted to the history of a woman, there being but two books in the Word of God which bear the name of women: Ruth, a Gentile, who married a Hebrew husband: and Esther, a Jewess, who married a Gentile husband.

The basic purpose of the book of Ruth is the tracing of the genealogy of David, and of David's Lord, while its primary message is that of rest, and this, through redemption and union with one's redeemer.

Outline

1. Ruth Resolving (1)

2. Ruth Responding (2)

3. Ruth Resting (3)

4. Ruth Rewarded (4)

Or as G. Campbell Morgan has in a simple way summed up the book's message:

1. The Choice of Faith (1-2)

2. The Venture of Faith (3

3. The Reward of Faith (4)

Notable Notes

The book of Ruth is a classic love story without ever using the word love, setting forth the power of pure love to overcome all difficulties. Strangely enough, it is not the story of a romantic love between a young man and a young woman, but the story of a young widow's passionate and devoted love for her mother-in-law.

The book reveals a high ideal of wedlock, married life being treated as a sacred and lofty companionship in 4:11-17.

There is nothing in human literature more beautiful and sublime than Ruth's address to Naomi in 1:16-17: "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go: and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

Scroggie has helpfully pointed out and summarized the book's typical teaching, beginning with the meanings of the names which occur.

1. Bethlehem, House of Bread; Elimelech, My God is King; Naomi, Sweet (?); Mahlon. Song; Chilion, Perfection; Ruth, Satisfied; Orpah, Skull (?); and Boaz, Strength.

2. These three women represent—a saint backsliding, Naomi; a sinner rejecting blessing, Orpah; and a sinner believing and blessed, Ruth.

3. Boaz may be regarded as a type of Christ, as Lord of the harvest (2:3), Dispenser of bread (3:15), Kinsman-Redeemer (2:20), Giver of rest (3:1), Man of wealth (2:1), and our Strength.[3]

Added to the above is the fact that the book of Ruth provides a lovely picture of Christ and the Church.

Further, it is the story of a prodigal family which went to the far country.

The book furnishes the only example of the law of the kinsman-redeemer (goel, Heb.) in action.

It provides the link between the tribe of Judah and David, the genealogy at the end of the book being a most important document (it is found in Matt. 1).

It is noteworthy that Ruth is one of the five women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ. The marvelous, matchless grace of God is revealed, in that, three had bad records (Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba), and three were Gentiles (Tamar, Rahab and Ruth).

The book of Ruth was, and is, one of the Megilloth or Festal Rolls, one of which was publicly read at each festival, Ruth being read at the Feast of Pentecost. One of the primary designs of the book is to trace the descent of David, and to show that the Gentiles are not outside the scope of God's redeeming love.

In studying the book of Ruth it is well to keep in mind that in the midst of sin and apostasy, as was the case with Israel at that time, God always has those who remain faithful to Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ, typified by Boaz, destroys race and class distinction.

It would be well to study 1 Corinthians in the light of this book.

The LORD JESUS CHRIST is seen in the book of Ruth as our "KINSMAN-REDEEMER"

1 W. Graham Scroggie, Know Your Bible, I, p. 56.

2 F.B. Meyer, Through the Bible Day by Day, II, p.40.

3 Scroggie, op. cit., pp. 56-57.