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June 28th: Judges 10 & 2 Thessalonians 1

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The weakening of the judges. Anticipation of future vindication in the present.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Judges 10. After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he lived at Shemir in the hill country of Ephraim, and he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried at Shemir.

After him arose Jeab the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys. And they had thirty cities, called Havath-jear to this day, which are in the land of Gilead.

And Jeab died and was buried in Caiman. The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him.

So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of

the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites, and they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.

And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals. And the Lord said to the people of Israel, Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines, the Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites, oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand? Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods. Therefore I will save you no more.

Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen. Let them save you in the time of your distress. And the people of Israel said to the Lord, We have sinned.

Do to us whatever seems good to you, only please deliver us this day. So they put away the foreign gods from among them, and served the Lord. And he became impatient over the misery of Israel.

Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead. And the people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said one to another, Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

In Judges chapter 10 we start to encounter a lot more minor judges. These judges have very few details given about them. Perhaps one of the more interesting things here is the chiasmic pattern that we can see from chapters 10-12 in the pattern of the judges.

Gideon has 70 sons, Tola has none, Jireh has 30 sons, Jephthah has a son but no daughters and as it tragically ends up for him no heir. Ibsen has 30 sons, Elon has none, Abdon has 40 sons and 30 grandsons which makes 70. So Abdon is comparable to Gideon with 70 sons, Elon comparable with Tola, both of them have none, Ibsen and Jireh both have 30 sons, and then in the centre is Jephthah, the guy who has no heir.

By centring on Jephthah in this way and framing his lack of an heir compared to people like Abdon and Gideon and Jireh and Ibsen we see something of the significance of that particular story. Increasingly the matter of dynasties is starting to emerge. These people have sons, they don't seem to establish strong dynasties but this issue is starting to come to the surface.

Tola is the first of the judges mentioned here and Tola and Pua are both words referring to Scarlet Dye as James Berjon has noted. Also they are prominent names of the tribe of Issachar as we see in 1 Chronicles 7.1. The sons of Issachar, Tola, Pua, Jashub and

Shimron, four. A previous character called Jireh is mentioned in Numbers 32.

He also has a number of cities in the region of Gilead named after him and in the New Testament we meet a character called Jairus so this name seems to belong to that region. Jireh is another judge discussed only briefly, most notable for his sons, their donkeys and the cities. The words used here for the donkeys and the cities are similar.

Jireh has many sons presumably because like other of the judges he multiplies wives. This is not a good sign, it's direct disobedience of the law for the kings which by analogy should apply to the judges too. There are further changes in the ways that these judges are spoken of.

John Barrett has noted that there are no references to battles, no reference to rest but reference to their death and the location of their burial. They accomplish something but they don't bring full rest, they are cut off. James Bajan also notes that they are said to arise rather than being raised up by the Lord.

The Lord's agency in their deliverance is less pronounced and the activity of the judges seems to be less effective. Death overtakes them and they do not ultimately bring rest. The people of Israel do evil in the sight of the Lord.

They serve seven different sets of gods and this is an act of great treachery and betrayal. The Lord is angry with the jealous anger as a result of it. He sells them into the hands of the Ammonites for eighteen years.

This can be paralleled with chapter 3 verses 13-14. He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites and went and defeated Israel and they took possession of the city of Palms and the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. There's another eighteen years here and once again the Ammonites are involved.

God has delivered them from seven different nations only for them to give themselves over to seven different gods. And at this point the Lord simply refuses to save them. They come to the Lord in times of their distress once again but they abandon him the moment that times are good.

God seems to be there to bail them out when they're in trouble. They use him to deliver them rather than committing themselves to him. The Israelites respond to the Lord's refusal to deliver them at this point by a more serious expression of repentance and change of course.

They put away their false gods and they serve the Lord. And the Lord at this point becomes impatient with their suffering and their misery. The Lord is a jealous God but he's not a vengeful God.

He does not delight in seeing his people suffer. And the chapter ends on a cliffhanger.

The Ammonites turn up and encamp in Gilead while Israel encamps at Mizpah.

This is in the region of the Transjordan not that far from the Jabbok. The leaders of Gilead are desperate. Whoever is able to lead them in battle will be head over them all.

The desperation with which they are reaching out for a leader in the time of their distress is similar to the desperation with which they reach out to the Lord whenever they're in trouble. A desperation that is not matched with faithfulness when it really counts. A question to consider.

What lessons about the character of true and false repentance might we learn from this chapter? 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to give thanks to God for you brothers as is right because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are also suffering. Since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The salutation with which 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 begins is almost identical to that of 1 Thessalonians with the slight alteration of God the Father to God our Father and the addition of from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of verse 2. This epistle was likely written fairly shortly after the first epistle.

Paul still seems to be ministering with Silas and Timothy, the missionary team that first worked among the Thessalonians and the epistle is addressed from them. However as in 1 Thessalonians Paul is the actual writer of the epistle throughout. In verse 17 of chapter 3 I Paul write this greeting with my own hand.

This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine. It is the way I write. Even though

the letter is addressed from Paul, Silvanus and Timothy then, Paul is the sole author.

The main thing that the changes from 1 Thessalonians in the introduction underline is the fact that the grace and peace aren't primarily from Paul and the other missionaries but from God himself. As before Paul moves from this to express their continued thanksgiving for the Thessalonians, now presented not in terms of their actual practice but as their fitting response to what God has done and is doing in the Thessalonians. Their increasing faith and love for each other is evidence of the work of God's grace among them.

The missionaries boast about the Thessalonians and all the other churches that they go to on account of the Thessalonians' steadfastness and faith through trial. While some of the Thessalonians might be discouraged, Paul and his fellow missionaries cannot hold in the delight and the joy and the pride that they have in seeing the way that the Thessalonians are growing and prospering in their faith. Unlike doting grandparents with pictures of their grandchildren, they can't help but go everywhere and show everyone and tell everyone about what God is doing among them.

The steadfastness of the Thessalonians in affliction is evidence of the righteous judgement of God. It is an anticipatory sign in the present of their future vindication. Their faithful suffering for righteousness' sake identifies them as those who are blessed, as those who will be vindicated in the day of judgement.

Persecution is the path that leads to the inheritance of the kingdom, and those who find themselves on it have cause to rejoice, for their vindication will come. They are suffering for the kingdom, which is itself a sign of God's grace. There is a paradoxical character to all of this.

Suffering is not usually a positive sign, but for the Christian it can be. This evidence of their future vindication is also a sign that they are considered worthy of the kingdom. This is not something they have earned, so much as a matter of grace.

God has marked them out by suffering, graciously declaring them worthy of his inheritance. We might think about the reaction of the apostles to their persecution in Acts 5.41. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name. God's justice will be seen in the way that he will repay their persecutors for their evil, while rewarding the Thessalonians, the missionaries and all suffering Christians with relief.

This will occur when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in fiery judgement, enacting divine wrath on all who do not know God, those who reject the knowledge of God that has been given in the Son, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The language of judgement for not obeying the gospel may seem arresting to us. What does it mean to obey the gospel? The gospel is, at heart, the message of Christ's

lordship and kingdom.

To obey the gospel is to submit to this, to Jesus as Lord. Paul alludes to Isaiah 66.15 here, For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. When this time comes, those who disobey the summons to bow their knee to Jesus Christ will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, and exile from the presence of the Lord and of his glory.

They are confined to outer darkness, cut off from all the blessings and the goodness of God's special presence. Once again, Paul is borrowing language from the Old Testament prophets. Here it is the language of Isaiah 2.10, Enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the Lord, and from the splendour of his majesty.

It's worth noting that Paul is taking up an Old Testament statement where the Lord refers to Yahweh, and he is relating it here to Jesus. We should also consider the way that Paul frames eternal destinies here. The emphasis is not upon two places, heaven and hell, but upon two different relations in which people stand to the glory and presence of the person of Jesus Christ.

One party are brought into and vindicated in the presence, and manifest and participate in the glory, and the other party is utterly cut off from them, experiencing absolute, utter and final loss. Heaven is, at its very root, not a place so much as the glorious presence of a person. Heaven is where we enjoy Christ, the new heavens and the new earth, where Christ is present with his people.

When Christ comes, he will be glorified in his holy ones. The church will display and reflect his glory, and he will be glorified in her, a people refined as gold through suffering. Paul's constant prayer is that God will make the Thessalonians worthy of his calling.

This way of describing things, of God making them worthy of his calling, makes clear that the worthiness is something that God produces in his people. We will be judged according to works on the last day, but the works are ways in which God has conformed us to the judgment that he has made concerning us. The Declaration of Justification is worked out, to borrow an illustration from the early Luther, in some ways like a sculptor who declares the sculpture that he is going to produce from the block of marble before he has begun to fashion it.

The judgment is proleptic. It anticipates the way that God will conform us to that judgment. God calls us and then he makes us worthy of his calling.

The calling happens first, and then we are made worthy of what we have been called for. This process is one in which we are active as God's transforming power works in us and through us. We are never the final source of the action though.

The end of all of this is that the name of the Lord Jesus is glorified in us. We are his workmanship, and when people see us, they see what he has created in us, and then we are also glorified in him. The grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ is that which governs this entire process of salvation, from beginning to end.

At no point does it rest upon anything other than God's unmerited goodness towards us and his Son. A question to consider. The letters to the Thessalonians should encourage us to think much more about Christ's final coming and the age to come.

How might Paul's teaching here change the way that we think about the new heavens and the new earth?