

A.B. Simpson:

"And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me, in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matt. 28: 18-20.)

The whole story of the Book of Joshua may be applied, in a broader sense, to the people of God collectively, and especially to the New Testament church. In an important sense the whole body of Christians may be called the spiritual Israel. And the history of God's ancient people is full of interesting parallels and lessons for us, even if they may not be exact types in this respect.

ISRAEL'S FAILURE

1. The failure of Israel to enter into the land of promise through unbelief, had its parallel in the rejection of Christ by His own countrymen, and the consequent rejection of the Jewish people from the privileges of the Gospel. But as for ancient Israel there was still a period of probation and long suffering, which lasted for forty years, affording individuals the opportunity of entering into the spiritual blessings of God's covenant, so there intervened a similar period after Christ's rejection by His own people, before the final destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews. And as there were some of even the first generation of Israel who believed, so there were exceptions in the ministry of Christ and His disciples, from among even that unbelieving nation, who gladly accepted their Messiah, and entered into their spiritual inheritance.

APOSTOLIC TRIUMPHS

2. The glorious career of Joshua, the crossing of the Jordan, the conquest of Canaan, and the dividing of the inheritance among the tribes of Israel, find their striking parallel likewise, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, and the triumphs of Christianity, when the Church, to a very great extent, claimed her inheritance of power, purity and blessing, and entered upon the conquest of the world for Christ, until there was scarcely a region of the globe where the Gospel was not at least planted and the strongholds of Satan challenged and shaken.

The crossing of the Jordan may well illustrate the Cross of Calvary, and the experience of death and resurrection which was so emphasized in primitive Christianity. The new covenant has its counterpart in the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the Gospel of full and free salvation. The death of Moses and the advent of Joshua, whose very name is suggestive of Jesus, suggest the transition which then actually came, from the law to the Gospel. The victories of Canaan had their counterpart in the triumphs of Christianity. Dividing the inheritance foreshadowed the various gifts of the Holy Ghost distributed to the Church.

The supernatural element which runs through the entire story of the conquest of Palestine, was more than realized in the final centuries of Christianity in the manifestations of the divine presence and power, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. And the choice possessions won by Caleb, Othniel, Achsah and others, remind us of the transcendent examples of piety, faith, love, knowledge, and holy power and usefulness, which adorned the annals of the early Church.

FAILURE OF THE CHURCH

3. The failure of Israel to enter promptly and fully into their whole inheritance, also finds its counterpart in the church of the New Testament. With all its fresh beauty and divine glory, still there was much of human imperfection and melancholy failure. The old cry, "There remains much land yet to be possessed," "How long are you slack to go up and possess all the land which the Lord your God has given you!" is echoed back in more than one of Paul's sorrowful admonitions to the churches he loved; and still more strongly in the appeals and warnings of the Son of God to the seven churches of Asia, through the last messages of the Holy Ghost, sixty years after His ascension. There we find Him saying to the strongest of these churches, "I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love. Therefore, be watchful and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God." And to another, "You have a name that you live, and are dead." And yet again, "You say, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked."

Already, even in the lifetime of Paul and John, the primitive church had allied itself sufficiently with the world to

open the door for many of the errors which afterwards entered and overwhelmed the purity of the early Church.

THE DARK AGES

4. The fearful declension of ancient Israel, leading ere long to the dark chapter of the Book of Judges, and their shameful compromise with the heathen world and subjugation to its power, is more than paralleled in the story of the dark ages of medieval Christianity, through the same cause, namely, the failure of God's people to separate themselves from sin and worldliness, and to enter into their full inheritance. The purity and strength of apostolic Christianity were speedily lost in the unspeakable corruptions of an apostate church, with all the errors and abominations of that anti-Christian system which took the place of the Church of God for twelve hundred years, and has been well called a "baptized heathenism."

Many of the pictures of the Book of Judges might find a vivid counterpart in the story of the Middle Ages. The graphic picture of Micah and his mother, with its strange intermingling of dishonesty, religion, and ritualism, almost seems like a parable of much of the religious life of such a period, and, indeed, is not without its parallels in our own days. Like Micah's sanctuary, many a formalist has folded his arms in the midst of violence and sin, and said, "Now the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to be my priest."

Notwithstanding these there were many exceptions in ancient Israel -- a wise and patriotic Deborah, a brave and faithful Barak, a divinely-called Gideon, a single-hearted Jephthah, and a mighty Samson. And so, even in the darkest ages of Christianity there have not been wanting those who have not defiled their garments, and who at times have dared to rise up for God against those that did wickedly, and shed a divine luster on their times and names. Such were the noble army of the martyrs, and confessors -- a Waldo, a Wickliffe, a Huss, a Savonarola, a Bernard and a Bede.

At length the time of reformation came to ancient Israel, when Samuel, the prophet, arose to recall his people to their ancient faith and prepare them for the coming kingdom. Such a ministry of our own time was that of Luther and the Reformation, calling back the Church of God to her ancient faith, and arousing her to claim her lost inheritance. But, as even Samuel's mighty work was in a measure ineffectual, and was followed for a time by the counterfeit kingdom of Saul, and the false and worldly aims of his countrymen, which led them into a separation from God that left its effects for half a century, so even the revived Christianity of the Reformation has not been perfect; and, like ancient Israel, the Church, delivered from her immediate foe, has given herself up, to a great degree, to a spirit of worldliness, and to look for her kingdom in a forbidden world.

There is much today of the spirit of Saul in nominal Christianity; the pride that finds its satisfaction in earthly gifts, talents and successes, and fails to recognize the true King, who, like the rejected David, waits for His throne as the "despised and rejected of men." The kingdom of David seems to prefigure the true triumphs of our coming King, and the ushering in of His dominion in the final victory of Christianity.

MILLENNIAL VISIONS

5. The peaceful and splendid throne of Solomon completes the picture of the millennial glory which is to be the consummation of the Christian age. Then will come the full inheritance of grace and glory, both for God's ancient people and the Church and the Bride of the Lamb.

What, then, for us, in the Church of God today, is the teaching of this ancient Book?

(a) It summons her to her glorious crusade of conquest against the enemies of Christ. Never was there an age more full of encouragement for the good fight of faith and the conquest of the world for Christ. The whole land is before us; every avenue of influence at home, every missionary field abroad, is open for the Church's zeal and holy enterprise. The triumphs of the Gospel in the past fifty years have not been unworthy of comparison with Pentecost, or even with Joshua's campaign. True, it has been but a small section of the Church that has dared to claim these victories, but the recompense has been sufficient to call forth far higher achievements and aspirations. Especially should the near prospect of the coming kingdom arouse us to go forth and win for our glorious Captain the crown of all the world, until every citadel of heathendom, and every stronghold of sin shall have become a monument of His grace and power.

More emphatically still, let the tender lesson of Rahab in the beginning, and the Cities of Refuge at the close, remind us that our supreme conflict is for the souls of sinful men. And beyond all the questions of dogmas, and the discussion of principles, and the undermining of systems of error and iniquity, let our objective point be individual men and women, and our highest and brightest trophies, the transformed lives of the most helpless

and degraded of our race.

(b) Let us, like Joshua and Israel, go in and possess all our inheritance. The Church has been slack to do this, and is still slack. She has not claimed her full inheritance of knowledge and truth, nor entered into all the fulness of God's precious promises.

She has not entered into her full inheritance of holiness, but has been content to look upon a life of sanctity and devotedness as an exceptional exhibition of individual temperament rather than as the duty and privilege of every child of God.

She has not entered into her full inheritance of faith, nor recognized the power that lies latent in taking God at His Word and daring to claim all that He has spoken. A life of becoming faith and remarkable answers to prayer is regarded as something special and wonderful, a sort of peculiar calling on the part of some individual of exalted piety.

She has not entered into her full inheritance of love and unity, but has been rent with strifes, divisions, jealousies and controversies, which have left Hebron in the hands of the Anakim and her Lord "wounded in the house of His friends."

And she has failed to enter into her full inheritance of supernatural power. The gifts of Pentecost have never been recalled, but have only been imperfectly claimed, and natural talent, human learning and worldly influence have been their weak and insufficient substitutes. Let us go in and possess all the land. All power is given unto our Joshua in heaven and in earth, and lo! He is with us always. "God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of sound mind." Let us, therefore, "stir up the gift of God that is in us"; let Zion hear her Master crying. "Awake, awake, put on your strength, your beautiful garments"; "Arise and shine, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you."

The Almighty Presence of our risen Lord is sufficient for any obedient service which we will dare to attempt in His strength and name. Let us put on the whole armor of the Lord, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might," and clothed in all the fulness of the unchanging Paraclete, let the Church of God go forth to the last campaign of the great conflict.

(c) Let the Church remember the necessity of separation from sin and the world if she would overcome her enemies and possess her full inheritance. She must cross the Jordan and let its unbridged torrents roll between her and the world. She must know the true meaning of circumcision and let Gilgal roll away the reproach of Egypt from her spirit and person. She must watch against the sin of Achan, and not let the accursed thing touch her spotless hands. She must take no tribute from the Canaanites, nor lean upon the world in the slightest measure for her support.

She must separate from forbidden alliance with the ungodly, and stand "fresh as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Alas, this is the secret of her weakness and failure; she has gone, like Israel, into a forbidden league with the tribes of the land. She has put her head, like Samson, in Delilah's lap, and her locks are shorn, and all her shaking of herself will not renew her strength until she has taken the place of the Nazarite and separated herself from a defiling and hostile world. "Come out of her, My people," is the Master's call; and as the Church obeys it, will she stand forth in her primitive purity and power and draw all men unto her Lord.