

13. Yahweh and Israel: Fulfillment beyond Failure

Biblical material: Exod. 3:6-14; 6:6-8; Josh. 24:1-18; Jer. 5:19, 22; Ezek. 16:26-29, 34; Hosea 9:1; John 20:21; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 John 2:12.

Quotes

- Your faithfulness makes you trustworthy to God. *Edwin Louis Cole*
- The only way to make a man trustworthy is to trust him. *Henry L. Stimson*
- A true friend never breaches the trust of his companion or stabs in his back. He is trustworthy and reliable. One should therefore always try to be a true and reliable friend. *Sam Veda*
- When all is said and done, friendship is the only trustworthy fabric of the affections. So-called love is a delirious inhuman state of mind: when hot it substitutes indulgence for fair play; when cold it is cruel, but friendship is warmth in cold, firm ground in a bog. *Miles Franklin*
- For changes to be of any true value, they've got to be lasting and consistent. *Anthony Robbins*

Questions

Why did God continue so long with Israel? Knowing the future, why does God bother? What of ourselves—how do we relate to God? What is the on-looking universe gaining by examining what happens here on earth? How do we as “spiritual Israel” differ from ancient Israel? What are the most important “take home” lessons from our studies this quarter?

Discussion/ Comment

“Your maker is your husband.” Isaiah 54:5 NIV. Here is the heart of the relationship—God uses all the most personal and intimate imagery to persuade us that he is not hostile, that he does not look for servants, but friends. Friends that are more than mere acquaintances, rather the closest of friends such as father and son, mother and daughter, man and wife. As we've looked at the examples of Old Testament couples, we have often been disappointed at the failures. Now as we consider the “couple” this week—God and Israel, we conclude that just like Gomer failed Hosea, Israel failed God. From the New Testament we learn that we are spiritual Israel. And are we in reality any different to Israel of old?

The lesson suggests that there is “fulfillment beyond failure.” But there remains much failure in this time too. As is so clear in the majority of marriage relationships we have considered, the lesson is that there is so much negative and very little positive. Yet as we consider the lengths God is prepared to go to win us back to love and trust, then we can have supreme confidence—not in ourselves, but in the nature and capacity of God to love us back into a trusting relationship with him.

In Jeremiah (2:2, 3) God compares Israel to a bride, in the wilderness wanderings. Yet how often, even then, did the bride complain—about the food, the bitter water, the desert, wishing to be back in slavery in Egypt. God the liberator was surely terrible disappointed by his murmuring and troublesome bride. Yet he is not willing to give her up, and tries to teach vital lessons on the way. But as we know, that “bride generation” perished in the wilderness. Why? Because of lack of trust, an unwillingness to be teachable, and a real “problem attitude” to their loving Lord.

In Numbers 25:1-3 (NIV) we see Israel so quickly adopting a “different” worship style: “While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor.” It seems that the temptation to “worship” in this sensual, self-gratifying way was a huge temptation. And God had to step in to prevent it, because it was so completely against all the true God represents. How could his people truly reveal God through fertility orgies. It may have seemed to those involved that to follow Moabite customs and religion was both intriguing and satisfying. But the heart of the problem is false worship and a misrepresentation of who God is. God wishes to reveal who he is, and he cannot do that through some Canaanite sex orgy!

God is revealed in the clearest way through Jesus, who said himself that he came to reveal the Father. As we’ve looked at some of these Old Testament examples, including the nation of Israel, we can only conclude that there was no other way for God to get his message across. He had tried to do this through prophets, priests, and people, with very mixed results. The only way to truly reveal God was for God to come himself. He is the one who reaches out to us. The church—us—we are the bride of Christ. He wants to have that level of closeness and friendship with each of us. And who would want to say no to such a loving Lord and friend?

Ellen White Comments

The great sin of ancient Israel was in turning from God to idols. This is also the great sin of modern Israel. The apostle Paul said to the Gentile churches that he had raised up, “Ye turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from Heaven.” He could truly say to many of them, “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” When he saw them becoming indifferent, the ardor of their faith chilled by backslidings, he exclaimed, “I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” He entreats them to be followers of God as dear children, and to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Again, he exhorts them to walk in Christ Jesus, even as they had received him, that they might be rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith. He reminds them, “Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.” {RH, June 3, 1880}

A Lesson from the Failure of Ancient Israel When the Israelites entered Canaan, they did not fulfil God’s purpose by taking possession of the whole land. After making a partial conquest, they settled down to enjoy the fruit of their victories. In their unbelief and love of ease, they congregated in the portions already conquered, instead of pushing forward to occupy new territory. Thus they began to depart from God. By their failure to carry out His purpose they made it impossible for Him to fulfil to them His promise of blessing. Is not the church of today doing the same thing? With the whole world before them in need of the gospel, professed Christians congregate where they themselves can enjoy gospel privileges. They do not feel the necessity of occupying new territory, carrying the message of salvation into regions beyond. They refuse to fulfil Christ’s commission, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Are they less guilty than was the Jewish church? {ChS 184-5}

