

THE DAYS OF THE JUDGES

by Frank Wallace

Wallace's biblical history covering the period after Joshua's death, examining Israel's state under the judges, their cycles of disobedience and deliverance, and lessons of faith and leadership.

22 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 02. The Book of Judges
2. 03. The State of Things after the Death of Joshua
3. 04. The Person of Othniel, the First Judge
4. 05. The Work of Othniel 1. The Challenge
5. 06. The Work of Othniel 2 - The Committal
6. 07. Ehud And Shamgar
7. 08. The Oppressors : the Moabites
8. 09. The Person of Eglon - the King of Moab
9. 10. The Person of Ehud, the Second Judge
10. 11. The Work of Ehud in Delivering the Nation
11. 12. The Person of Shamgar, the Third Judge
12. 13. Deborah
13. 14. The Nature of Prophecy
14. 15. The Oppressors - the Canaanites
15. 16. The Person of Deborah, the Fourth Judge
16. 17. The Person of Barak
17. 18. The Song of Deborah and Barak
18. 19. Gideon
19. 20. The Person of Gideon, the Fifth Judge
20. 21. Gideon - A True Worshipper
21. 22. Gideon Defeats the Midianites
22. 23. The Failure of Gideon

02. The Book of Judges

The Book of Judges The book of Judges is a sad book in many respects. It opens on a very high note. Two tribes were dependent upon the Lord and concerned about acquiring the territory that belonged to them in the purpose of God, a very noble ideal. There were clearly people operating in the mind of the Lord, but when we come to the end of the book we find a very, very sad condition, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). There was no direction, no order, no law, but instead independency and lawlessness. What a sad end to such a promising start. This book contains high heights of faith and courage, but it also contains abysmal depths of sin, lawlessness and wickedness. In many ways it represents the days in which we find ourselves. Many of the people of God are concerned about the situation, and seek help from the Lord to do that which is right, but unfortunately many others, professing the name of Christ are not concerned about His glory or about His truth. The book occupies a very interesting place in the history of God's dealings with His people, Israel. Preceding it is the glorious dual leadership of Moses and Joshua; Moses, the great deliverer out of Egypt, the lawgiver, the leader through the wilderness, the great man of God, the man who spoke to God "face to face" (Exodus 33:11), a man who was indeed for God in every sense of the word; and Joshua, his successor, leading the nation into the land, possessing much of the territory, setting a personal example to the nation, exhorting them not to serve other gods, and in spite of all that was against them, he could say, "but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). And then, immediately following it, we find the great recovery beginning with the Moabitish maiden, Ruth, and the recovery of Naomi. This paved the way for the introduction of Hannah, Samuel, David and Solomon, the great heights to which Israel rose under the power and the might of God. Here, between these two great peaks of glory and blessing we find a valley of darkness, of failure, and of departure from God. Thank God there are those that shine brightly in it, men and women inspired with a desire to be true to God, a desire to be faithful in a day when many were not. The Relevance of the Books of Judges and of Ruth to us today In viewing the great leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ and all that He accomplished on Calvary's cross in the beginning of the Church period, we can say, 'what a triumph, what glory was there', and we can thank God that what began there still exists. What a wonderful day that was when the power of the Spirit of God was evident to all, souls were being converted, assemblies set up, and the testimony of God circulating throughout the world; it was a time of unparalleled blessing and spiritual prosperity. However, it was not long before that time came to an end, divisions, troubles, sin and strife came in, and after the death of the apostles there was scarcely anything that was recognisable to what had begun at Pentecost, so much evil and false doctrine had crept in. But God, in His mercy, granted recovery, and down through the history of the Church we find men and women of God rising above the prevailing conditions, having faith in God and being dependent upon God, who refused to acquiesce in the conditions, who were concerned to overcome for the pleasure and for the glory of God. The history of the Church is bright with those names, names that are respected amongst us, men and women who fought valiantly for the truth down through the ages, and we would not be where we are today if it had not been for their faithfulness. Unfortunately, many of

those great movements declined after the leaders died, when after the fresh exercise of those men and women of God declined there came deadness, failure and departure. This has marked every movement of God right up to the present day. But again we can say, 'Thank God, in spite of all the departure, there will always be those who desire, in the fear of God, and in the power of the Spirit of God, to be true to Him'. It is a challenge to our hearts will this be our attitude to the prevailing declension that we find in our own day? Will the book of Judges provide for us help and stimulation that we might desire, above all else, to be here for God in spite of all that is around?

03. The State of Things after the Death of Joshua

The State of Things after the Death of Joshua

"Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him." (Jude 1:1-3)

What we find in the beginning of the first chapter of the book of Judges is extremely encouraging. Two tribes, Judah and Simeon, were desirous of acquiring their inheritance and they exhibited two features that we might well covet today. First of all, they were dependent upon God - they asked the Lord what they were to do; and secondly, they fellowshiped in obtaining what they desired. Notice in verse 1, "the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?" This is the secret of true prosperity before God - there was dependence upon God. The great leader had gone, Joshua had departed. They might have thrown up their hands in despair and said, 'There is no-one to lead us, there is no-one to guide us, there is no-one to help us', but they did not, they turned to God.

All through the Bible, when a leader dies there seems to be failure following. This was true in the apostolic day Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29-30 saying, "after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." The power, strength and direction of the apostles' leadership was sufficient to keep at bay those evil things while they yet lived, but when they died it seemed a great barrier was removed and evil men began to work. This has always been true. In Christianity no matter how great the leader is, he pales into insignificance in relation to our great leader, our Lord Jesus Christ; the saints of God are never without a leader. We can always turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, "the Captain of [our] salvation" (Hebrews 2:10). He is always, and always will be, the head of the body, no-one can take this glory from Him. He is the great High-Priest (Hebrews 8:1), the Son over God's house, He is the One who is always available for His people, and it has been well said that God buries His servants and carries on His work - the servants may be great, but they are not indispensable. So we can take courage. We are sad that there are not more men of God amongst us compared with days that have gone by, more men able to expound the Scriptures, able to show us the way to live and to understand the truth and we would value their help today, but they are not here, so we must go on, and the Lord Jesus has vouchsafed His presence to us to encourage us and help us in spite of all the difficulty. From this passage there is the greatest possible encouragement. Dependence upon the Lord in prayer, whether individually or collectively, and practical fellowship with each other, are means that we can use at all times to combat the evil tendencies of the day. When the Lord saw this dependency and fellowship active amongst His people "the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand" (1:4), the Lord was with them. It was not now Joshua in the forefront directing the

battle, the Lord was with them; after all, it was the Lord that delivered them even when Joshua was leading. Joshua may have been in the forefront, he might have been the spokesman, the man whom God was using, but it was still the Lord who was winning the battles. It was the Lord that had helped Moses and who later helped David, and indeed helped every servant of God down through the ages. Here, there does not appear to be an outstanding man, they were simply men who were dependent, men who were willing to help one another, and the Lord delivered their enemies into their hand.

We may not do miraculous or sensational things ourselves, but from this portion we learn that when we exercise dependence upon the Lord, and when we seek to help each other, something really worthwhile can be secured in the inheritance that belongs to us. We hold on to it in a practical way and we enjoy it in a deeper fashion if this dual thing is in evidence - prayer and fellowship with each other, with those with whom we can walk, with whom we can worship, with whom we can face the problems of the day and find courage and strength. So we should keep praying, assembling together, and finding our joy in each other's company. The inheritance which belonged to Israel was an earthly one, but they failed to secure it because of their unfaithfulness and their disobedience. We know that we too have an inheritance (we have it in Christ), and that there is a future inheritance that we shall share, and we can thank God for that. We shall share it with Him, but we also have a wide range of eternal, spiritual blessings which are secure and centred in Christ, and each one of us is responsible to God and privileged of God to enter into these things and to enjoy them now. We do not enter into the blessings simply by having the knowledge of them on our bookshelves, or even understanding them in our minds. A certain truth can be known and enjoyed in this fashion, but truths are to take hold and to govern our lives so that all can see that these things are paramount in our lives. These truths are the things which really matter, these are our inheritance, this is what we really believe, this is what we seek to lay hold of, this is what we seek to maintain, and we never can unless we express this dependence upon God, and also act in practical fellowship with each other.

04. The Person of Othniel, the First Judge

The Person of Othniel, the First Judge

We find in Othniel one of the bright lights of the book of Joshua. His name means 'lion of God', or 'force of God', but whichever interpretation is taken, we can see that it means that there was strength and power with this man, and as we examine his life in the few details that we have of it, the meaning of the name that he bears is amply borne out. First of all we can see what a favoured young man he was. He belonged to the royal tribe Judah, the tribe from which our Lord Jesus Christ came. Here was a man who was prepared to fight to overcome the enemy; he was prepared to fight to secure for himself a wife, he was governed by the Spirit of God and was used of God to secure great things for God and for His people.

These features that came to light in Othniel were seen in perfection in the great "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5), our Lord Jesus Christ. He answered to the challenge, and what a challenge it was. Satan faced Him with his challenge immediately He set out on His public pathway with the temptations in the wilderness; but He met that challenge and He overcame it, He overcame the great enemy of the people of God. He "loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25); loved it so that He might secure it for Himself that He might have it for His own heart's desire and blessing. He too was governed by the Spirit of God, not that there was any possibility in the life of Jesus that He would in any way rebel against God, or that He required to be controlled by the Spirit, but in the gospels we find that every step of the pathway of Jesus was in the power of the Spirit, and in the power of that Spirit He offered Himself up to God without spot on the cross of Calvary. But we do not want to speak of the Lord now (precious though that is), but instead speak of the portion of the word that speaks about one who had features that were like the Lord Jesus - Othniel, a courageous man.

We can divide Othniel's life into two portions, firstly the challenge that came to him, and secondly, the committal that was given to him. He came from the royal tribe, a favoured tribe. It was a good position to be in, but not only was he in a good position but he expressed in his life that he was a real man of God; he was a real 'son of Judah' if you like. Judah was the tribe that was to reign, and this we find in Jacob's blessing of the tribes in Genesis 49:10, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah". Here was one who was imbued by that spirit, here was one who said, 'I am prepared to fight in order to secure this territory, it belongs to us, and I am going to fight to secure it.'

05. The Work of Othniel 1. The Challenge

The Work of Othniel 1. The Challenge

"And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi. And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher: And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs." (Jude 1:9-15)

It was Caleb who gave the challenge, and he gave a wonderful promise too, that for anyone who was prepared to overcome the city Kiriath-sepher, there would be given his daughter for a wife. Now Othniel answered this challenge and he fought against this city. The name of this city means the 'city of a book'. Without being imaginative it could be suggested that this represents all the accumulated wisdom and knowledge that man has acquired down through all the ages of his culture, all the things that he boasts in, all the things that he has accumulated in opposition to God (the libraries are full of this today); but there is nothing to help the soul, there is nothing there to lead us to God, indeed, it would all take us away from God, and we are reminded that "the world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Corinthians 1:21), and "none of the princes of this world knew [the wisdom of God]; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). Golgotha, that place of a skull, really sets forth the features of man's empty knowledge; no eyes to see God, no ears to hear anything about God, no tongue to speak for God, nothing in the mind to be held for God - the skull, an empty thing, typifying man's accumulated wisdom. This was the kind of thing that Othniel overcame, he responded to the challenge. We might almost say that he said 'There is only one thing that I am concerned about, and that is doing God's will in overthrowing all that man boasts in, and securing the city for God'. There was certainly going to be blessing for him; this was what we might call a secondary thing in one sense, the first thing was acquiring the territory that really belonged to God and His people. When the ark of the covenant went over the river Jordan, the name of the ark was "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth" (Joshua 3:11), and because the ark went over and the nation behind it the nation was to secure the land for God that it might be for His pleasure and His people might dwell in it, but conflict had to be waged in order to make this a reality, and so Caleb says, 'If anyone is prepared to fight and overcome Kiriath-sepher I will give him Achsah, my daughter, for a wife'. Not only was Othniel the member of a favoured tribe, he had a very famous uncle, Caleb, a man who "wholly followed the Lord" (Numbers 32:12, Deuteronomy 1:36, Joshua 14:14). What a faithful and devoted man Caleb was. We read in the book of Joshua that there came the moment when he

said, "I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me [to spy out the land]; as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in", and he was well over eighty years of age when he said it (Joshua 14:10-11). For forty years he had gone through the desert with Israel, but in his heart there was the faith that laid hold of the land; he was prepared to share all the circumstances of the wilderness, he was prepared to accept the government of God because of the failure of the others, but all that was in his heart was the desire of the land. 'I had the faith to go in and possess it, but others would not help me' he said, but the time came when he had the opportunity to enter in, and he proved that he had the faith and he had the strength, and he overcame the territory that was rightly his, and he acquired it.

Now here is Othniel, the nephew of this great man. He shows the same characteristics. It would be a wonderful thing if all the nephews and sons of the men of God were to follow the pathway of faith, but sadly, they do not. Many of them give up, many of them have no interest in divine things; but here was a true follower of his uncle. Here was one who exhibited exactly the same features of courage, determination and faith in order to do the things that were pleasing to God; and he overcame sin. It is a great thing when men are prepared to turn aside from man's knowledge with all its boasted heights and accept God's will and God's direction.

There was a young man who at one time was a very bright young Christian. He was a very intellectual young man, but there came a moment in his life when he did not want to be connected with the few despised Christians in the University city where he was. When he occupied a chair in that University city, he said his students would not think very highly of him if he identified himself with the few Christians who were meeting there gathered to the Lord's name. He despised them. There may come a day when his students will despise him. He made a choice for this world's wisdom, this world's position and he refused the company of the few despised ones who sought to be true to the Lord according to the truth; and many others have failed in exactly the same way. This world's knowledge with all its charm and with all the pre-eminence that it gives to people is a great obstacle for young people to overcome, and some get carried away with it, and they would rather have that than the truth of God. But Othniel overcame this obstacle. He was not going to be overcome by man's boasted knowledge, however great it was, he overcame, and in overcoming he got a wonderful blessing. It is a marvellous thing to have a good wife, a wife with spiritual desires, and that is what Othniel found, a woman who was ardent in desiring blessing; she asked Othniel to ask her father a blessing, and we get the impression that perhaps Othniel was a little slow, so she jumped down herself and she went to her father and asked this blessing. "Give me a blessing," she said, "give me also springs of water" (v.15). What a wonderful woman to have as a companion, one who was ardent in desire, one who knew what to ask for, something worthwhile.

I am not going to try to spiritualise these two springs, the upper and nether springs, except to say that above all things it represents real life and refreshment. Those who have been in the Middle East know something about the scarcity of good, clean, fresh water. What a boon it is, being very, very scarce in many parts, it is something to be desired. It means life, it means refreshment, it means health and wealth, for men, cattle and produce. And this was one of the things that was promised by God in Deuteronomy 8:7, the land was to be "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills". There was an abundant supply of water; and here is this dear woman asking for these two springs, she wants refreshment in life, she wants real life there that she can depend upon. Now man may make a reservoir and may do all sorts of things in

relation to water, but a spring is something that sovereignly comes from God. It is something there that He provides, it is something that springs up with life and vitality and it is fresh and pure and clean. We read in the days of Genesis of the conflicts that went on in relation to springs of water, and when they were filled up with earth they had to be re-dug so that the springs could come forth with all the refreshing vigour (26:17-22).

Now here was the woman saying, "give me also springs of water", and her father gave them to her. That was his present to her, and she was his present to Othniel; so he was wonderfully blessed and this is the whole point of this passage here, that conflict is worthwhile. It is easy to give up if there is some particular problem in our life, some particular spiritual matter that requires to be entered into with God in conflict. If we are not finding the blessing, if we are not finding the victory, then it is so easy to say, 'What is the use? I am not going to worry any more, I am not going to seek that victory that I was so concerned about, I am going to give up.' But Othniel said, 'I am going to win. I am determined to win'; and he did, and what a wonderful recompense he got. Not for one moment should we approach the difficulties of our spiritual lives just simply to have the joy of saying, 'I have won'. This is a very low standard of spiritual desire. It should be so that we might be better equipped to represent God, that there might be more testimony in our lives, that there might be something worthwhile in our lives of a permanent character.

Now after the battle was waged, and Othniel and Achsah went about arm in arm. People would say, 'There is the fruit of that man's courage, there is to be seen the value of a man who was prepared to fight for something, and look at what he has obtained.' There would be a continual witness of his courage and of his faith and of his sterling worth. There was the evidence of victory secured. Paul said to Timothy that he was to "meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all" (1 Timothy 4:15). There would be the evidence in Timothy's life of a life devoted to God in earnest spiritual conflict, and that not only would there be personal profit for him, but there would be benefit to the saints of God also. That is the real secret of conflict in connection with things of the Lord. There is not any Christian who is not in a conflict; Satan attacks us every day of our lives, seeking to overthrow us in our testimony if he could, but let us thank God for spiritual conflict and for the determination to overcome.

06. The Work of Othniel 2 - The Committal

The Work of Othniel 2 - The Committal

"Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-Rishathaim eight years. And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the Lord delivered Chushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-Rishathaim. And the land had rest forty years." (Judges 3:8-11) The second portion of Othniel's life reiterates what has already been said that when a leader of the people of God dies a very serious condition can afterwards prevail. This is what happened here, "there arose another generation after them, who knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel" (2:10).

Those who have read Mr. Darby's letters will remember that he often wrote that he and his companions had to endure great conflict in order to secure the truths that God had so graciously given to them. They sacrificed a lot, they endured a great deal of reproach, but they did secure a large part of the inheritance. What he feared was people coming into the enjoyment of these things, or into the position where they were known, without sufficient spiritual exercise to maintain those truths in power and testimony. This is one of the reasons for the consequent declension of brethren testimony, people took and occupied a position, but without the exercise that belonged to it.

Here, in Judges, a generation arose that did not know the Lord and did not know His works. In the book of Deuteronomy Moses instructed the fathers and mothers of Israel saying, 'When your child asks, What do these things mean, you are to explain them to your children, telling them all the history connected with those different occasions of comings together and the different events connected with the history of Israel' (6:6-25). The responsibility of conveying to the children the great events connected with the history of Israel and the Lord's blessings to them lay very definitely on the shoulders of the fathers and mothers. Hence, if a generation arose that knew not the Lord or His works, it infers that there was a lapse in the teaching of the fathers and mothers. There was a generation that was untaught in relation to the Lord or His works, and because they did not know the Lord, and because they did not know His works it was so easy for them to give up. They had nothing to hold onto. They were in a position, but had no living exercise connected with it, and it is so easy to give up something that we are not concerned about. The result of this was that they forsook the Lord and worshipped idols, a very, very sad condition.

However, we cannot do this in our lives and get away with it, it is not that easy. We cannot profess to be a Christian and follow after idols and expect everything to be lovely. It was not so in Israel's case and it will not be so in our case. There cannot be any spiritual joy, nor any life or power in our lives if all that we are concerned about is idols, and for ourselves this means pleasing ourselves

and following our natural desires. There is no joy toward God in Christ, nor any power in testimony in such a life. This is why we are so thankful to turn to a man like Othniel who sought in the power of the Spirit of God to retrieve some of the former fortunes of Israel. When the children of Israel were given over into the hands of their enemies, they felt the burden of this government that was upon them because of their unfaithfulness, and they cried to the Lord, "And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war" (v.9). The inference is that he judged Israel for forty years, and as long as he judged Israel there was blessing amongst them (v.11). Here is the committal that comes so soon after the challenge was met and secured. This is the kind of person that God desires to use, who God delights to use; a man who has proved himself in personal conflict in relation to the things of God, an overcomer. This is the kind of person that the Spirit of God will use for blessing amongst the saints.

It is good to see that the children of Israel felt the position, but do we really feel our weakness and poverty at the present moment? Are we really concerned about it before God? Can we look down with vision (if the Lord does not come) as to what the outcome will be in a few years? Those who are able to teach, do we really make it a matter of concern before God that the present generation is taught adequately and correctly in view of the years that are ahead (if the Lord does not come)? The responsibility rests upon those who are older to make sure that the younger generation are correctly taught in view of the continuance of the testimony through grace. These people felt very keenly the prevailing conditions, and they cried to the Lord. Brethren, let us cry to the Lord that he will raise up those who are able to help us in our present weakness that there might be blessing, encouragement and food among the saints of God in these last days before the Lord comes. The Lord always hears genuine cries for help, not selfish cries or the pitiful breathings of casualness, but the real cryings, the concerns of the people of God in relation to need. And where did God turn to? He turned to a proved man, a man who was reliable; He raised up Othniel, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon Him, and Othniel wrought mightily as he had done before at Kiriath-sepher, not to secure something for himself now, but to secure something for the people of God, for God's interests. This was not now a personal matter, this was a matter concerned with God Himself and His beloved people. He was prepared to accept this committal that had been given to him; that of a deliverer raised up by God.

We should not look on ourselves as deliverers, and think of ourselves as official persons to be recognised by the saints of God, that is not the thought, but each one in our own lives should overcome and provide, in the power of the Spirit, something of benefit for the people of God, whether it is in the Bible readings, or in the ministry meetings, or in our personal contacts with the saints, or in opportunities of visitation, or in any way in which we can help the present prevailing conditions. Othniel was used of God. After eight years his testimony was raised up. Othniel had not lost any of his exercise nor any of his strength in the intervening period, and then for forty years he judged Israel. There was a time of apparent prosperity and blessing. Unfortunately, we know that they were not consolidating what they had secured in the time of blessing, it was apparent strength, it was only revealed as weakness after Othniel died.

Dear brethren, the moments we have that are available to us to consolidate what we have are valuable moments. It is not for us to come to the Lord for strength when we have wasted the

intervening moments, when we could have been enjoying something of the things that God has given to us. We need to gather up strength to consolidate what God has given us so that, when the time of pressure and trial comes, we are able to stand. Othniel was faithful in the personal challenge, he was faithful in the committal that God gave to him. May we, in our day, be found in the same way, overcoming in our own individual lives, and ready to help as governed by the Spirit of God.

We should also say that there is a vast difference between the Spirit's power and activity in the Old Testament and that in the New - the Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel and, as long as he required His power, it was there for him. Until the day he died he knew something of the power of the Spirit of the Lord upon him. However, like David, the Spirit might be taken from him (as it was from Saul - 1 Samuel 16:14), but this could never happen at the present moment. We are "sealed [with the Spirit of God] until the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). The Spirit of God indwells our bodies until the day the Lord comes for us, or until the day we die. It is a very sad thing if we are unfaithful but we cannot lose the Spirit of God, He is always with us. The Lord promised that He would be with us forever (John 14:16). It is sad that in a day marked by glory, blessing and wonderful opportunity, we might fail to take advantage of the power and blessing that is there for us. May the Lord help us to be stimulated by the example of such a man as Othniel.

We find exactly the same story in the book of Joshua; it is repeated almost word for word (Joshua 15:15-19, Jude 1:10-15). Is it something that has just slipped in? No, dear brethren, it means that Othniel, in a day of blessing, prosperity and power, as the book of Joshua shows, is portrayed as a man of courage and faith and as a man who works for God; the same story is seen in Judges, a book which tells of great weakness, great difficulty and great departure, and the moral is obvious - that in days of prosperity and in days of weakness the same opportunity is open to all to be faithful to the Lord. The Lord helps those who are thoroughly committed to His interests and who take up the challenge to be overcomers. Thank God for those who overcome for God in days of prosperity; thank God for those who overcome in days of weakness. May it be our portion for His name's sake.

07. Ehud And Shamgar

Ehud And Shamgar A Summary of the Times of the Judges When the leaders in Israel died, the people lost heart, they disobeyed, and in following after other gods they incurred the wrath of God against them. God in His mercy raised up deliverers to be a help to the nation. Othniel was the first saviour, or judge, or deliverer, whom God raised up for the benefit of His people, but after he died the same thing happened as before, the people went into disobedience and followed after other gods. We find in Judges chapter 3 that the nation was under bondage to the king of Moab for eighteen years (v.14). This was not directly because the king of Moab was a courageous man and vanquished the nation of Israel, the real cause was the failure and disobedience of the people of Israel. No nation would have been able to stand against them if they had remained faithful to the word of God; but because Israel was unfaithful then they came under bondage in different ways.

Application of These Old Testament Passages to Ourselves In applying these Old Testament Scriptures to ourselves today, there is a vast difference between the blessing that the people had in that day and the blessing that we have today; that is, we are not under law, we do not attempt to keep the law in order to get blessing from God, we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ on the ground of sovereign mercy, our blessings are eternal, secure in Christ, and will never be taken from us. But the blessings in Israel's day were consequent upon their believing God and being obedient to His law, and of course when they failed in that they forfeited their blessings. However, in the Old Testament and in the New Testament there are similar features, and obedience is one of them. The nation of Israel was responsible to be obedient and Christians are responsible to be obedient; there is the government of God consequent upon failure equally true in all days. So there are various other things that we must take account of that are common to the days in which we live and to the days of Israel. Blessings are consequent upon obedience, and chastisement is consequent upon disobedience. These things must be kept in mind to understand the application of these passages to ourselves.

08. The Oppressors : the Moabites

The Oppressors : the Moabites

"And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees. So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years." (Judges 3:12-14)

First of all, the oppressors came from Moab. We learn from many passages who Moab was and of his descendants. He had a very sad beginning. Moab, the son of Lot, was born as a result of a sinful act (Genesis 19:30-38) and all down through the history of his descendants there was the exhibition of the same kind of evil features in opposition to God. In Numbers 22:1-41 Balak the king of Moab hired Balaam, the false prophet, to curse the people of God. There Balak was being true to his parentage, he was being true to that evil beginning, he was exhibiting those evil features of opposition to God and to God's people. When we come to Numbers 25:1-18 we find that the daughters of Moab were a snare to the sons of Israel and through fornication and idolatry they brought terrible sin and its evil consequences into the nation of Israel. They, too, were true to their parentage. We find that God gave a very definite commandment against Moab; in Deuteronomy 23:3 God says that a Moabite or an Ammonite was not to come into the congregation of the Lord for ever, this was God's command against the Moabites. In Isaiah 16:1-14 we find God describing the characteristics of Moab that merited judgment, He said Moab was arrogant, proud and wrathful (v.6). There were three evil features connected with the Moabites. In Judges chapter 3 the king of the Moabites represents all these evil features, and it would seem that in our application of them to ourselves it would mean that if we, as Christians, become disobedient to God's word there is a danger that we will be overcome by these features that are set forth in the king of Moab; we will become arrogant, proud, wrathful, evil, independent of God and morally we will lose our place amongst the people of God for any effective testimony. This then is seeking to apply what the king of Moab stands for.

Moab could easily have claimed kinship with Israel - Abraham and Lot were relatives and Abraham saved Lot out of his position in Sodom, but there the likeness ceased. All the sons of Abraham on the line of faith, beginning with Isaac miraculously born to him, were men of faith and men of power to God. Lot's posterity, Moab and Ammon, were the inveterate enemies of Israel and they proved it in every moment of Israel's testimony, they were always against the people of God. Moab could easily have said, 'We are relatives of yours, we have the same ties, we are in the same position in a certain sense, we ought to be together and help each other'. They have claimed to be sons of Abraham down through the ages and right up to the present moment, but we shall see that there is a very great divergence between those who are fully of Abraham, children of faith, and those who are of Moab, the enemies of God's interests.

Looking at the companions that Moab had, we see Ammon and Amalek, two other enemies of Israel; there are no friends of Israel in Moab's company, they are all enemies. But we have already said that God said that neither a Moabite nor an Ammonite was to come into the congregation of the Lord for ever, this was God's command against them. Amalek was against the throne of God, they were arrogant and possessive and God said that there was to be war against them right to the end. Here is this very formidable confederacy against the nation of Israel, Ammon, Moab and Amalek. How was this going to be met? Bondage to any one of them was a great concern, but during the eighteen years it does not appear that anyone attempted to relieve the bondage. No-one had the courage, no-one had the resourcefulness, but God in mercy raised up one who was able to do something about this bondage in the person of Ehud.

09. The Person of Eglon - the King of Moab

The Person of Eglon - the King of Moab "Eglon {king of Moab} was a very fat man." (Judges 3:17)

Let us look first at Eglon. He represents a man who is perfectly satisfied with his surroundings, what is natural, pleasing and what is advantageous to him. Scripture says he was a very fat man, and this has to be recognised in various other parts of Scripture as representing a poor condition before God, a condition that usually ends in independence and failure. We can look at it naturally as saying he was not a man given to physical exercise, he was not a man who was full of energy and vitality, but rather a man who was enjoying all that there was of the world before him, and consequently, he was in this bloated condition that indicated a physical condition that was not good. This is the natural position, but it has a spiritual import. In Deuteronomy 32:15 God said, "But Jeshurun (meaning 'the righteous people') waxed fat, and kicked..... then he forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation". What it simply means is that once the nation got all the blessings that God gave to them, once they entered into the land they had the vineyards, the cornfields, the minerals, the supplies of water. After they had everything that God gave them in His sovereign grace and mercy, they forgot Him. They forgot the One who had given them all these blessings and they lightly esteemed the God of their salvation. Was it possible that they could ever forget the bondage of Egypt? Could they ever forget the miracle of the Red Sea? Could they ever forget the wonder of crossing the Jordan, the destruction of Jericho, all the other blessings? Could they forget these things? Indeed they did. They forgot God, and they lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation. This is the kind of condition that Eglon represents in his bloated condition before God.

There is a New Testament parallel of this in the Lord's words to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14-22, which the Lord condemns. The Laodiceans said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (v.17), but the Lord, in passing judgment, said their condition was independent and self-satisfied, they were enjoying all that they had, they were an assembly gathered out to the name of the Lord but the Lord was outside, He was not there. They had forgotten all the wonderful things that God had done for them, they had forgotten all the blessings that they had received. What a condition to be in, and what an indictment against any company of Christians. This condition of Eglon represents this kind of thing. He was a tyrant, ruling over the children of Israel, and he had to be dealt with if the nation was to get liberty, so the Lord in His sovereign mercy raised up Ehud.

10. The Person of Ehud, the Second Judge

The Person of Ehud, the Second Judge

"But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left-handed: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab. But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh." (Judges 3:15-16)

It is sometimes dangerous to apply spiritually the meaning of names, as sometimes different expositors and translators give different meanings to names, but one that has been suggested in connection with Ehud is 'confessor'. Confession in the New Testament means 'a person with an inward conviction', it is not simply saying we give our mental ascent to a thing, saying, 'I agree with it' without ever giving any serious thought to the matter, whatever it might be. Ehud was a confessor, he was a man with an inward conviction, and we have not the slightest doubt that when the Lord raised this man up, he did not just say 'I am going to give you immense power to deal with this enemy', but instead God worked in Ehud's heart and conscience and produced in him a conviction that he was going to lead the people of God, and that it was a just and righteous cause, so that he was not only leading the people because of the position that God gave to him, but he was doing it because he believed in it.

What a wonderful thing this is when we come to the New Testament. Luke wrote concerning "those things which are most surely believed among us" (Luke 1:1). This is the evidence of an inward conviction. It is not that we have read the matter up well and know all it's terms, but there is an inward conviction of conscience and heart that tells us these things are true and that they are worth fighting for and holding on to. We are inwardly convicted that these things are right. Paul wrote to Timothy reminding him of the things he was fully persuaded of (2 Timothy 3:14), the things that he really knew and was persuaded were true. This is a wonderful position to be in. The battle is lost if we feel in our minds that the things we are fighting for are not worth it, if we have no conviction, and consequently find it easy to give up. But people with inward convictions about certain matters will hold onto these things and will fight for them and will maintain them. This is something that we do need in a very, very real way. For example, has the way we meet together as believers just happened by accident? Is it casual, is it the result of our leaders adopting this position and we just falling into their way of gathering together? Is this how we view our coming together in the way we do? If it is, sooner or later we will give it up, but if we are inwardly convicted and persuaded that what we do, however weak and feeble that it might be, is right according to the word of God, then we are going to hold onto it at all costs, and we are not going to allow anyone to steal it from us, or persuade us to give it up; we are convicted inwardly that it is right. This matter of confession can be examined in 1 Timothy 6:1-21, where Paul exhorts Timothy to confess a good confession, but which was first of all demonstrated perfectly in the Lord Jesus Himself "who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (v.13). What an exhibition of dignity the Lord Jesus gave in the presence of His enemies, humble subject Man that He was, and what grace and

dignified demeanour He expressed. This is the kind of thing that Paul desired for Timothy, he said, 'You follow that example, you be like the Lord', and of course, no-one could say about the Lord that He was not convinced that what He was doing was right. He knew that He was doing the will of God, and nothing would turn Him aside. 'Now', says Paul to Timothy, 'You have that kind of conviction, and you have that kind of life, you witness a good confession too'. This is the first thing about Ehud; he was a man of conviction.

Secondly, he was a Benjamite. This represents several things. Firstly it represented a pure line of descent, he was a son of Jacob, he was not of the line of Lot, Moab or Ammon, he was connected with the line of faith and the line of God's purpose. He could trace his descent backwards right to Benjamin, the son of Jacob, a member of that favoured family. This is a very wonderful thing to be able to do and it was a great source of power to him.

There are two things to be said about the name Benjamin. When he was born, his mother, as she died, gave him his name 'Ben-oni', that is, 'son of my sorrow', but Jacob changed his name to 'Ben-jamin', 'son of my right hand' (Genesis 35:18). In Psalms 68:1-35 we find that the Spirit of the Lord refers to Benjamin as "little Benjamin" (v.27), this was because he was the smallest tribe. It is important to keep these two names in mind, 'Son of my right hand', a place of power, and "little Benjamin", the place of weakness. How can these two opposites be brought together, a place of power and a place of weakness? They are absolutely essential for any servant of the Lord who wants to be faithful in his testimony, he needs a sense of his own weakness, and a sense of the power of God that can operate in that weakness. This can be illustrated in the life of Saul, the first king of Israel. Samuel the prophet said to him "When thou wast little in thine own sight....." (1 Samuel 15:17) in referring to the time when Saul, in this state of mind, did valiant things for the Lord. He was a mighty warrior, but then he got proud and disobeyed God and lost his strength and courage. When he was little he experienced the power of God operating through him.

Another Benjamite was the New Testament Saul, and these two things are combined. He said he was "less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:8) he was always prepared to take a low place, he was able to say, "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). There were mighty acts of the Spirit done through this man in his humility, through his lowliness of mind, and in his willingness to take that low place. How humble the apostle was, how like his Master, how entirely without the pride and arrogance of the Pharisees, who displayed the characteristics of the Moabites. He was truly 'a little Benjamite', he was one who exhibited the features that are so pleasing to the Lord, "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6), and this principle is found all through the Bible. It was found in Ehud in the place that he took. The low place of humility and the sense of one's own weakness and inability is the real secret of the Spirit of the Lord operating for God's glory. So Ehud was a real Benjamite, one who knew something about being weak and unable, and yet also, as we shall see, he experienced something of the power of the Lord.

11. The Work of Ehud in Delivering the Nation

The Work of Ehud in Delivering the Nation

"And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present. But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him. And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly: And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out. Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them. When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber. And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth. And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath. And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them. And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the Lord hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years." (Judges 3:17-30)

We might feel as we read this narrative what a cruel, violent and deceitful thing Ehud did. Is this the kind of thing God commends, that a man should make himself a dagger (or a 'two edged sword') and use it against this seemingly defenceless man? Is this the kind of thing that God approves of? The first thing we have to remember is, what kind of man was he? He was the determined enemy of God. He was subjugating the people of God. There was no worship, there was no response to God as long as this man was in control, and he had to be dealt with, and in a very definite way. 'Oh', we might say, 'this is not the spirit of Christianity'; but we must be careful before saying this. The Lord said, "So hast thou them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate" (Revelation 2:15), and is this not the language of Christianity? "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26) and "mortify (kill) the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13) are similar passages. This applies to us personally. It may not be dealing with people violently, it is not killing people, but the principle of ruthlessness in relation to that which is against God still applies to us today.

There is no love to be shown to Moab, not the slightest. God has declared him to be an enemy, and an enemy must be dealt with with the utmost ruthlessness. So it is with us who are Christians. Paul says that he wished that those who were opposing the Galatians were accursed (Galatians 1:8-9). Oh, we may say, this is not the spirit of Christianity, but this is what Paul says, and Paul was the greatest exponent of Christianity, and he states very definitely that he wished those who opposed the truth and led the people of God astray accursed, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha [accursed until the Lord comes]" (1 Corinthians 16:22). This is ruthless language, very stern language, but along with this goes the grace, kindness and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to those who are in need.

Christians should always be ready to show help and sympathy to those who require it; but there should also be that determination to oppose anything that is contrary to the claims of Christ. This is seen in John's epistle when he says to the elder lady, 'If those professing the name of Christ do not come with the truth, if they come with another gospel, a perversion of the truth, do not show them the slightest courtesy or hospitality, do not let them into your home, do not even bid them God speed or you will become a partaker of their evil deeds' (2 John 1:7-11). These are very stern words, not our own words, they are the words of Scripture, and all through the New Testament we will find this very stern and ruthless teaching in relation to evil in ourselves, or in other people, or wherever it is found.

It says of the Lord Jesus that He "loved righteousness, and hated iniquity" (Hebrews 1:9). It is very difficult for us to hate as Christians, and hate in a righteous spiritual matter. The Lord could hate as perfectly as He loved. He loved with perfection, and He hated with perfection. It is often very difficult for us to do this, because of some personal matter involved that may arouse our hatred and our anger, but the Lord Jesus hated things because they were in opposition to His God and we also have to have those features. In the Proverbs there are seven things the Lord hates: "These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16-19). God expects His people to hate them too, and to make sure that first of all they are eradicated from our own lives, and to make sure that we do not give any permissiveness in relation to them in others. So Ehad had a two edged sword, and it is to the New Testament that we turn to interpret this. In relation to the Lord Jesus' place amongst the assemblies, it says, "out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword" (Revelation 1:16). This is the application of the Word of God in exposing and condemning, and also encouraging the things that He finds amongst His people. Also in Revelation 19:15 it says, "Out of His mouth goes forth a sharp two-edged sword, that with it he should smite the [Gentile] nations", the opponents of Israel at the end of the time of tribulation. Turning to Hebrews 4:12 we find that "the Word of God is..... sharper than any two-edged sword"; we also read in Ephesians 6:17 that we are to take "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". For Ehad it meant literally using this violent weapon to overcome this enemy of Israel; for us it means the application of the Word of God to everything that we know is opposing God. Dear brethren, it is the best weapon we have, we can use all sorts of considerations in dealing with those who oppose God, but the best thing to do is to quote the appropriate part of the Word of God that deals with the matter in question. This is always the means that God uses to overcome the enemies of the truth.

Martin Luther, John Wesley, William Tyndale, John Wycliffe and many others all used the Word of God effectively to deal with the problems of their day. It has been well said, that in using this two-edged sword, we begin by using one edge against ourselves, and then we can use the other edge against other persons or principles. This is very good advice. If we can overcome evil in ourselves, we have every right to attempt to overcome it in others; but if we have not begun to deal with the problems in our own lives, we have no moral authority in trying to deal with it in others or elsewhere. The application of the Word of God to ourselves is an extremely important matter; Paul used it to great effect in His arguments; Apollos used it, being mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24), and he reasoned that Jesus was the Christ; the Lord Himself did it dealing with Satan (Matthew 4:4; Matthew 4:7; Matthew 4:10); all said, "It is written.....". And down through the ages in the Christian testimony, again and again it has been the same, the effectiveness of one's testimony in dealing with that which opposes God is to be found in the ability to handle the Word of God correctly. So in '2 Timothy days', when there is so much opposition to God, we are reminded that every word of God is inspired and is profitable for the man of God for all things (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

There is another thing that Ehud had that has some meaning for us today. First of all he was a confessor, secondly he was a member of a famous tribe and showed the proper feature connected with it, thirdly he had a sword and he used it effectively, and then after he dealt with this enemy he blew a trumpet, he gave a clear note. This is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:8, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" This is what Ehud did, he blew the trumpet, he assembled the people, he asked them to follow him, which they did, and a great victory was secured. There is a crying need for this kind of ministry today, a ministry which strikes a clear note as to certain conditions that prevail. Paul did not beat about the bush, he did not say ambiguous things that might be interpreted according to the wish of the people. If there were things that were wrong, he spoke out clearly and distinctly, he named the things so that people could take account of them and adjust themselves in the light of God. We read in the epistle to the Corinthians again and again, Paul naming the things that were wrong, he did not make statements that might be misunderstood, he spoke plainly about the things he understood were wrong; and of course as the people applied themselves to that they adjusted themselves in the light of God, and triumphed, and blessings were secured. So Ehud blew the trumpet, he assembled the people, and he said, "Follow after me" (v.28). What right had he to say that? Morally he had the right because he himself had showed courage in entering into the very presence of the leader of the enslaving enemy, and he, by his personal courage and energy, had killed the king. Now he was asking the people to follow him. Had Paul any right to say to the people, "Be ye followers of me"? (1 Corinthians 11:1) Certainly he had, because he went on to say ".....even as I also am [a follower] of Christ". He had the moral right to say to the people of God, "Follow after me". Only in the measure that we ourselves have been successful in combating evil, will we be able to induce others to follow us. Oh, how we would desire to be like Ehud in this respect, to be able to encourage the people of God to walk in this pathway of overcoming. He was very, very successful "the Lord hath delivered your enemies, the Moabites, into your hands" (v.28). The end of the chapter tells us that for eighty years the nation had rest. What a wonderful blessing. It did not begin very auspiciously, one man being raised up, but because of his courage, his energy, his ability and his initiative, the victory was secured, and the people of Israel had rest for eighty years.

12. The Person of Shamgar, the Third Judge

The Person of Shamgar, the Third Judge

"And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel." (Judges 3:31)

If we read the book of Judges carefully, we will find that those who fought for God used many unorthodox methods. Shamgar is seen fighting with an ox goad (3:31); Ehud was left handed (3:15) - this was a characteristic of the tribe of Benjamin, for later on we find seven hundred Benjamites who were described as being left handed (20:16), an unusual thing. Ehud was out of the ordinary as being left handed; in a sense he was abnormal. We find also that Shamgar fought with an ox goad, and he killed six hundred Philistines with it. This was quite an achievement, and it has a meaning for us. The Philistines never showed any kindness to the people of God. This is seen in the books of Samuel, when David overcame firstly Goliath, and then the nation itself. David was another man who had a moral right to lead the people of God because of His success with Goliath. The Philistines occupied territory that they had no right to, it belonged to Israel. They had wandered into the territory and acquired it, and wanted to hold onto it. The Philistines represent the people who make a profession of Christianity, just like the Moabites in their kinship with Israel, but they had no living link with God. They were professors only, like those who the gospel describes as saying, "Lord, lord," and yet the Lord has to say, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22-23). This will never happen to any true believer in Christ. If we are sheltered with His blood then we are sheltered for time and for eternity, there will be no refusal for those who have accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord; but what an awful position for the professor, without any life, without any cleansing from guilt, to take the position of a Christian, to be baptised, to have the place in testimony as a Christian, and to have no life or knowledge of salvation. The Philistines represent this kind of person, they are in a position but without the possession of life and blessing from God. So how did Shamgar deal with them? Again, by using the Word of God. Is there anything in the New Testament to show that this is what it means? Yes, there is. When Saul of Tarsus was arrested on the Damascus road, the Lord said, "Saul, Saul..... it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:4-5). What the Lord was saying to him was, 'Saul, the Word of God has continually been brought to bear on your conscience, and you have rejected it. It is like a prick or a goad (an ox goad, if you like), continually pricking into your side reminding you that you are not right with God, and you are refusing those directions, and it is hard because you are not coming into blessing, you have not got liberty or joy, simply because you are not being obedient'. Saul of Tarsus bowed that day, and said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (v.6), and he followed the Lord ever after. When I was in Israel some years ago, I saw an Arab ploughing with an ox and an ass, an unequal yoke, and the evidence of this statement was there before me. The Arab had a long pole in his hand, eight or nine feet long, and on the end was a sharp piece of metal. The animals did not move out of the straight and narrow way, but if they had they would have received a prod in their side with the sharp instrument. That would have been extremely sore and would have reminded them that they were not doing what the ploughman

wanted them to do, and it would get them to return to the straight way. The more they sought their own will, the more prods they got with the goad; and the more they wanted their own way, the more painful the process. This is the illustration that the Lord was using with Saul of Tarsus. Thank God he bowed, and he had no more of those painful pricks.

We turn to Acts 2:1-47, and there were many people who believed the word that was preached. They received the forgiveness of their sins, and they were brought into joy, peace and liberty; but there were many more that refused, and in a sense, they were slain by the Word of God. If they did not eventually trust Christ they would die and a day would come when they would be judged because of their refusal to accept Christ as Saviour. We find in Acts 7:1-60 again a company of people who were presented with the word of God, and they refused it; and because they refused it, they lost the opportunity of blessing. All through the Acts of the Apostles the same story is told, people heard the word, some believed it and received blessing, and others refused the word and were 'slain', not physically slain, but were brought under judgment because of their refusal to bow to the word of God. The truth either brings repentance or resentment, and those who resent the truth of the word of God being brought to bear upon their conscience and answering to it are morally slain before God, they have missed their opportunity and they are judged because they have refused that word. It is wise for us that when we hear the word of God pricking our conscience we obey it, we do not kick but accept what God has to say to us, and we openly accept it whether we be unconverted or converted, and get the blessing that it brings.

Ehud with a sword and Shamgar with an ox goad, would represent for us the same principles, the application of the word of God against everything that is contrary to His mind. It was true in those days, and how much more in our day, when, in a spiritual sense, we need to wield the word of God as a sword, we need to use it to reach people's consciences, and if we do this effectively, we will acquire power and we will do something worthwhile for God in testimony for His pleasure and glory.

Let us remember the demeanour, the power and the ability of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of His enemies in using the word of God. This is the perfect example for us in our day. May we be like Him, hate as He hated, love as He loved, and be like Him in all our ways.

13. Deborah

Deborah

Introduction

Once again we are confronted with something that is unusual. Previous to this record we found that the Lord raised up men to lead and to guide and to fight for Israel in their need, but here we find Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, sitting under her palm tree and judging the nation of Israel. This was a very, very unusual condition of things. It indicated that men were somewhat wanting in leadership, in courage and in direction from the Lord. An old brother in Port Seton often taught us that man represents position in Scripture, and woman represents condition. He often quoted Mary of Magdala at the sepulchre of the Lord on the morning of the resurrection. The disciples were found wanting, they were His servants, He had chosen them, but they were not at the sepulchre, they did not anticipate the resurrection, neither had they that intense love that Mary of Magdala had for the Lord. But she was found there because she was in the right condition; she loved the Lord, and because she was found there she received that wonderful message from the Lord, "go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). The Lord did not say to Mary, 'Now you go and get one of My disciples, they will go and carry this message'; she was available, she loved the Lord and she received this commission. Her condition was right.

Now similarly here, in the days of Deborah, we read a verse where it speaks about forty thousand men, "Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand of Israel?" (Judges 5:8). The inference is that among forty thousand men of war, there was not one who was prepared to stand up and represent the Lord and His interests in that evil day. "Until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel" (v.7), a woman with the interests of the Lord at heart. She was prepared to take this stand. Perhaps in the previous two addresses, in connection with Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar there was a great deal of encouragement for the brothers, but I would think that in connection with Deborah there is a great deal of encouragement for the sisters, that they too can stand up and be faithful to the Lord and do something for the Him for His interests.

Deborah - the Prophetess "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time." (Judges 4:4)

Deborah is described as a prophetess. The study of prophetesses is an interesting study in the Old Testament and in the New. We have not time tonight but we will just mention them.

In Exodus 15:1-27, when Moses sang his song of exhortation and joy, we find it is said that "Miriam the prophetess..... took a timbrel in her hand" and she praised the Lord too (vv.20-21).

Josiah, wanting to know the mind of the Lord, went to Huldah the prophetess and she very definitely gave the mind of the Lord (2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chronicles 34:22). It was not a particularly encouraging prophecy because it indicated that the Lord was angry with those who were refusing

to obey His word, but there was some encouragement for Josiah, that although judgment was coming, he personally would be spared.

We also find in Isaiah 8:1-22, the prophetess, the wife of the prophet, she bare two sons whose names represented different phases in the history of Israel.

Then we have Deborah, the prophetess, and I think these are the four in the Old Testament who indicate the prophetess character.

There is another one, Noadiah, in the book of Nehemiah (6:14), she is linked with Tobiah and Sanballat, the enemies of the truth of God, in their opposition to the man of God and his work.

When we come to the New Testament we find that

Anna is described as a prophetess in Luke 2:36. She prayed, she fasted, she sang praises and she spoke of the Lord to all those who waited for redemption in Israel. She was quite a remarkable woman and she was not young by any means, in fact she was very old, but we are impressed by the energy and the spiritual vitality and life that she had.

Then we find in the Acts of the Apostles that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). I would think they prophesied at home, because the Scriptures tell us plainly that women are to keep silent in the assemblies (1 Corinthians 14:34-38, 1 Timothy 2:11-12), so if they exercised their prophetic character then it must have been at home or in some private capacity by which they were able to convey the mind of the Lord to those who required it at any given moment.

I think that these six instances concerning nine women would cover the teaching concerning prophetesses in Scripture, it is a very interesting study, and I commend it to you.

14. The Nature of Prophecy

The Nature of Prophecy

We have now to ask, what is prophecy? I suppose most people would say, 'It is the foretelling of future events', and we would need to say, yes, that is one character of prophecy but it is not the only character because prophecy is the giving forth of God's word for the moment, the bringing to bear of the word of God so as to help the people of God in any particular situation (1 Corinthians 14:3). It is not merely quoting a verse out of the Bible, that is always very precious and we would not seek in any way to underestimate the value of that, nor is it giving a word on many things that we have heard over and over again, and there is certainly nothing wrong with that. Peter says, 'I think it fitting.... to stir you up by putting you in remembrance' (2 Peter 1:13), but there is such a character of ministry that deals with relevant problems that are particularly connected with the people of God at any particular moment. This is the present application of prophecy. The Bible is a very large book, and if a man or woman is guided by the Spirit of God to give an appropriate word bearing upon the condition of the saints at any given time then they are prophesying - they are giving a word of prophecy to meet particular needs.

1 Corinthians 14:3 tells us that prophecy is for three things, firstly, it is for edification, that means for building the saints up, building them up in their affections towards God, in their knowledge of the truth, in their responsibilities, and in their privileges. Secondly it encourages, or as the Authorised Version says, 'exhorts', it stirs up, engages the affections, the desires and the exercises of the people of God. The word of God brought to bear upon them exhorts or encourages them to further activity and further devotion in the things of the Lord. Finally, it consoles. It has been aptly said that it builds up, it stirs up and it binds up. Sometimes the saints need encouragement or help or comfort, and the word of prophecy is able to bring that to them.

One would think that when we come together upon special occasions, such as 'open' meetings for ministry, as we call them, meetings when the Lord guides some servant or servants to give a word of ministry, we should expect ministry of such a character that would help us in our particular needs for that day. I think it would be very wrong for a brother to prepare a certain message prior to coming to the meeting and feel, 'Well, I am going to give this prepared message'. Rather we should come together waiting humbly upon the Lord that He would give His servant or servants the appropriate word that is necessary for us at that time. It is not simply the unfolding of truth, although it is that in a sense, but it is a specific word to meet a specific need. That being so, how much we need to be cast upon the Lord and to have that waiting, not a rushing to make sure that I am going to speak, but waiting humbly before the Lord to get the Lord's mind, to give Him, we say reverently, the opportunity to speak, He Himself; and He speaks through servants. Now if we can only sit back quietly and humbly and have much prayer and exercise prior to those meetings, then I think we would find the Lord would give us the ministry that is necessary for us. This, I believe, is New Testament prophecy according to its present usage.

Strictly speaking, the time of prophets and the time for prophetic ministry is passed. The assembly was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20). Now you do not lay a foundation twice. If the foundation is laid, it is laid deep, it is laid strong, and on the foundation is reared the building. The apostles' and prophets' ministry was the foundation of the church. We must remember that in those early days they had not the New Testament in their hands as we have it. Many of the Christians were slaves, many could not read or write, but they could certainly listen. This is why Paul says to Timothy, "Give attendance to reading" (1 Timothy 4:13), that is, Paul's letters were read by Timothy to those who could not read, he would make them aware of the mind of the Lord. Now the New Testament apostles and prophets, guided by the Holy Spirit, spoke the word of the Lord as it was necessary. Now we have the revealed mind of the Lord in our hands in the New Testament. It has all been revealed to us, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and consequently any 'prophecy' that is given today is not of an inspired character, but really comes within the scope of what has already been revealed, the Holy Spirit takes from the inspired word and presses it upon our hearts and consciences, bringing a blessing to our hearts. Thus Deborah, being a prophetess, was able to convey the mind of the Lord to the people as they required it.

15. The Oppressors - the Canaanites

The Oppressors - the Canaanites

"And the Lord sold [Israel] into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel." (Judges 4:2-3)

If ever the people of God required all this, it was at the time of Deborah. Here was this mighty king of the Canaanites, Jabin, and for twenty years he had held the nation of Israel in bondage. The meaning of the name Canaan is 'merchant', and all through the Bible we find people who make a trade of things, whether it is the people of God, or the truth of God, or any other kind of thing, and generally they are portrayed in a very bad character. The worst of all, of course, was Judas, who was prepared to trade his master for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15). Surely this is the most outstanding incident and illustration of this kind of thing. When we come to the book of Revelation, we see great Babylon judged, the smoke of whose torment goes up to heaven, and we find that all the traders of the world have done business with her (Revelation 18:9-19). All the different trades and all the different materials and all the things of value have been connected with this great, evil system that is against God. The book of Revelation presents two cities, Babylon and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 18:1-24; Revelation 19:1-21; Revelation 21:2-27; Revelation 22:1-5), the question to ask is which city are we seeking to promote? For what are we building? We either promote the one or the other. If we are not those who make a trade of the word of God, that is, using it for our own benefit, we are trading for Christ, we are working for Him, we are sacrificing, we are working, we are doing the things that are pleasing in His sight. We are not marked by the spirit of the Canaanite, personal gain or selfishness, but rather sacrificing and seeking to promote the things of the Lord. This is, of course, the spirit of the Lord Himself. In the words of the parable, He sold all that He had in order to gain the treasure that was in the field (Matthew 13:44) and to obtain the pearl (Matthew 13:45-46) for Himself; the Lord Jesus Christ who was so rich, and yet became so poor in order to enrich others (2 Corinthians 8:9). This is contrary to the Canaanite. The Canaanite is prepared to get more, and more, and more. Suppose he makes others poor? That does not matter as long as he makes a gain, that is all that matters.

Now this is the kind of spirit that was holding the nation of Israel in bondage, and nobody seemed to care. Forty thousand spears in Israel, and not one lifted up in defence of God and His interests until this woman arose, Deborah, the prophetess.

16. The Person of Deborah, the Fourth Judge

The Person of Deborah, the Fourth Judge "Sitting under the Palm Tree of Deborah"

"And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment." (Judges 4:4-5)

Now it says that she "dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah". Now when the Spirit of God writes things in the inspired Scriptures there is a particular reason for it. It could have been an oak tree, it could have been any other kind of tree, but the Spirit of God has indicated to us there is something special about this tree, it is not just a palm tree, it is the palm tree of Deborah. There is a particular reference to it. She sat there and she judged Israel. They came to her with their problems and she helped them. So what do palm trees represent? The first reference to them is in Exodus 15:1-27, where the Israelites came to the wells of water and the seventy palm trees (v.27). Now as far as Israel was concerned, that was a tremendous blessing. They were thirsty, parched, hungry perhaps they had travelled through the wilderness, and they came to this place of refreshment and fruitfulness, a place of shade, a place of rest. When Solomon built the temple for God, the palm tree was very prominent in the decoration (1 Kings 6:29; 1 Kings 6:32; 1 Kings 6:35; 1 Kings 7:36, 2 Chronicles 3:5). When we turn over into the New Testament, we begin to get some insight as to what this means. You remember when Jesus was entering into the city of Jerusalem, they cut down palm leaves and they strewed them in the way as He entered, the victorious Messiah into His city (John 12:12-13). But there is another reference which I think finalises this thought in our minds, the idea of victory. In Revelation 7:1-17, John the prophet is given a vision into the future of a vast company of people who are saved out of the tribulation, they are martyred in the tribulation but they belong to the Lord, and they are standing before the throne and are singing His praises and they all have palm leaves, or palm branches in their hands (v.9) - victory has been secured, the battle has been won, they are through all the difficulty and trial, they have remained faithful, and in their hands is the emblem of victory. We believe this is what the palm tree represents above all else, victory.

Now, if we think of that in our minds, here was a woman who had the spirit of victory in her heart, she was sitting under her own palm tree, and she was judging Israel. It is most remarkable that in the Bible we find many servants of the Lord who exalt and triumph before ever the fight had started. When Jehoshaphat saw the tremendous army that was against Israel, he prayed to the Lord and the Lord guaranteed him that there would be a victory and before ever they began to fight Jehoshaphat got all the army into position and he sent the singers in front and they began to praise the Lord for the victory (2 Chronicles 20:1-30) and the battle had not even started! Now that is faith. The apostle Paul, although he passed through tremendous exercises and problems could rejoice. Think of him in the prison at Rome writing to the Philippians is telling them to rejoice (4:4). 'Why, Paul? you are a prisoner, the enemy has overcome you, you are no longer the servant of the Lord, why do you exhort the people in this way?' 'Well,' he says, 'I am still serving the Lord, I

am writing to the Philippians.' I do not know if that dear man could look down the ages and anticipate the millions of Christians who would derive comfort from his letter written from a prison but there he was rejoicing in spirit no thought of defeat. He goes on to say in that epistle, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (3:20-21). The tyrants of the future will all bow before the power of this glorious Man, who is at the right hand of God. Paul was not imbued in any way with the spirit of defeat, rather the opposite, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

17. The Person of Barak

The Person of Barak

"And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh." (Judges 4:6-9) And so Deborah sat under her palm tree, a spirit of victory in her heart. "And she sent and called Barak, the son of Abinoam, out of Kadesh-naphtali", and she said a very significant thing to Barak: "Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand" (vv.6-7). Now there is not a single evidence of doubt, uncertainty, or hesitancy in this message from Deborah, it is as clear and distinct as it is possible to be. She said, 'The Lord has commanded you Barak to go with those two tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali. He has even indicated the precise number who are to be called out of those tribes, and you are to go and fight, and the battle is won. The Lord will deliver him into thine hand'. Now that is a very wonderful message for anyone to receive, she was a prophetess, she had received it from the Lord, and now she was directing a man, and he had the right to be there, this is where the man should have been, in the leadership, directing affairs, and it really was an indictment against the manhood of Israel that a woman was giving this message.

Well, what kind of man was he? Well, he said, "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go" (v.8). What a pathetic kind of man! How he failed to appreciate the message that had been delivered to him. The message was one of certainty, of power, it had nothing to do with Deborah, it was all about the Lord, what the Lord would do, and if only Barak had received the message in the way in which it was delivered what an opportunity he had to shine in his leadership. Instead of that, God's government came in, and the prophetess gave another word, 'All right, Barak,' she said, 'I will go, but you have missed your opportunity. Now God will deliver the captain of Jabin's army into the hands of a woman.' That is the story as we take it down to the end of the chapter. Deborah gave the message of the Lord. It came to pass as she said it would. The army was defeated, the captain of the army was killed by a woman, and the Lord subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, at that time.

18. The Song of Deborah and Barak

The Song of Deborah and Barak "Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying..." (Judges 5:1)

It is quite interesting that, when we turn to the Hebrews 11:1-40, it is Barak who was commended for his faith (v.32). We cannot question the inspired word of God, perhaps if we had written it we would have said Deborah was entitled to this commendation for faith, but I suppose Barak too was credited with it because in chapter 5, when the song was sung, Deborah and Barak were both together.

Perhaps we say mistakenly that this was Deborah's song because it says, "Then sang Deborah and Barak, the son of Abinoam, on that day". They were joined together then. They were joined together in the action that overcame the Lord's enemies, Deborah directed, Barak followed, the battle was won, the enemies were destroyed, and that was a time for celebration. It reminds us of that exalted song in Exodus 15:1-27, one would say much more exalted than this song, a wonderful song of praise and worship to God because victory had been accomplished. This is the only song in the book of Judges. To tell the truth, after the death of Joshua, there was not much to sing about! There was much to be sad about. Many grievous things were done in the nation of Israel. But it is always true that in the Bible, when victory is achieved, then singing begins. And it has been true right down through the history of the testimony. There are many hymnbooks in use today amongst Christians, and most of the hymns that are sung are the products of revivals of one kind or another. Whenever there is a real revival amongst the people of God, with the power of the Spirit in activity amongst them, with blessing for the unconverted, blessing for the saints of God, we find that there is a rich addition of hymns to the Lord and to God, the Father, because of what has been achieved. If you search this out you will find that this is true. Take, for instance, the marvellous enrichment to hymnology in the Methodist revival through the hymns of Charles and John Wesley; hymns that are still being sung today with fervour and feeling and value. The brethren revival too has contributed many rich hymns of worth and depth and value, and many other revivals have contributed in the same way, hymns of worth, the product of conflict and victory. And we would trust that there would yet be a revival of interest amongst the people of God. There will yet be a time of blessing in answer to the end of Revelation for the unconverted, "let him that is athirst come" (22:17). We would desire to see this before the coming of the Lord, and if it were so, then I think we could anticipate many spiritual compositions of worth and depth and feeling.

"For that leaders led in Israel..... Bless Jehovah!" (Judges 5:2, J.N.D.)

Now I do not know anything at all about textual criticism and the ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek, and I find it very difficult to understand how the Authorised says, "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel", and Mr Darby's translation says, "For that leaders led in Israel... Bless Jehovah!", but I, for the moment, would like to use what Mr Darby rendered, that leaders led, and when the leaders led, the people willingly offered themselves. Now this is always true. It is true in

secular history that when a man of courage arises, whether it be in Scotland or England or any other place, you always find that there are people that are willing to be led. Prior to the leadership there seems to be an acquiescence in the conditions that prevail, whenever a man of courage rises up and says, 'Now look, this is what we ought to do, we are not going to accept these conditions of tyranny and bondage; I am prepared to do something for it, who is going to follow me?' And we do find in secular history that this was often the beginning of freedom from bondage.

Now this is exactly the principle in Deborah's song. Deborah arose, Barak arose under her direction, and the people, especially Naphtali and Zebulun, willingly offered themselves and something was achieved for the Lord.

Leadership is seen for us in the New Testament most definitely in apostolic authority, in the ministry that Paul, James, Peter and John provided for us, and also the others who were not apostles but were inspired of the Lord to give us the New Testament books. Now there we have, first of all, the authoritative leadership inspired by the Holy Spirit. In a lesser sense we have those who are called leaders, rulers, elders, pastors, overseers - people who are concerned about leading, directing or caring for the people of God. Now when this is done in a spiritual and proper manner, that is leading people to Christ, it is a great thing. I do not mean in conversion, that is the office of the evangelist, what I am referring to are elders, bishops/overseers and leaders/guides, these people are leading the saints of God to Christ. They are directing them to His glory, His power and His offices, that they might get the gain of all that is in Christ for their testimony and for their privileges. What a responsible position to be in. This is the place for mature, experienced Christians, and this is their responsibility in relation to the flock of God; not their flock, but the flock of God. And so when this is done in a spiritual, humble manner, subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the direction of the Lord, the people will willingly offer themselves; or will they?

They did not all willingly offer themselves here, as we shall see, but, thank God, there will always be those who will respond to true ministry that finds its centre in Christ. If it does not find its centre in Christ it will be doomed to failure eventually. It might be a very good idea, it might be a very reasonable idea, but if it is not centred in Christ it will be bound to fail. And so we find that the object of all those persons mentioned in the New Testament, who have responsibility in relation to helping the saints of God, is to lead them to Christ. In the thirteenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews the saints were exhorted to obey their leaders and to follow their conversation (Hebrews 13:7), says Paul, 'imitate them'. And what was the source or the substance of their conversation, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (v.8). 'Follow their example', says Paul, 'these are the men who are seeking to lead you, not leading you astray like false shepherds, but leading you to the Lord and into the fullness of His thoughts'.

"I Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel..... They chose new gods; then was war in the gates. Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?..... then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates." (Judges 5:7-8; Judges 5:11)

What a contrast! Poor weak woman, the weaker vessel that Paul speaks about, what an indictment against the forty thousand. She arose, they did not, here are two references to gates, and we have to ask, what does this mean? If you read the book of Ruth, you will remember there came the time when Boaz wanted to have Ruth for his wife but there was another man who had a prior claim according to kinship, and this matter had to be gone into; so they went up to the gate

(4:1). The gate in the Old Testament represented the place of administration. In the Middle East, in many of the arid countries, this kind of thing still exists, this is where the elders of the village meet to discuss problems; I suppose very much like the local council in our own towns and cities, where they come together to discuss matters of policy and matters that require attention. So it was in Old Testament times, the gates were the places where they met together to discuss matters and to regulate them according to the mind of the Lord.

Now what does this mean for us today? It means that we do not let things slide along in a haphazard fashion in connection with any company of Christians, and hope that everything will work out all right in the end. 'Ah, yes, the Lord will look after everything. He is capable of doing this'. Of course He is quite capable; but He expects us to do what we can in relation to His interests in any place where we are set, and when the saints come together to discuss His affairs they ought to be conducted with due reverence to the kind of business we are conducting. It is not an opportunity to express our opinions in a democratic or communistic fashion, we are there to discuss the things that relate to the Lord. It is His business. I say so reverently. They are His affairs, and they have to be studied, they have to be considered, they have to be arranged and settled in a manner that is consistent with His holy name. We gather to His name, and so the gates would be the considered attention that we give to the interests of the Lord.

"For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou amongst the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond the Jordan." (Judges 5:15-17)

Now, we come down to a few people who are mentioned here. In the history of Israel, when they came to the river Jordan there were nine and a half tribes who definitely settled for going over it to take possession of their inheritance, but there were Reuben and Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh who said, 'The grass is beautiful on this side of the Jordan, this is ideal for our flocks, let us settle here' (Numbers 32:1-5).

Now, said Moses, 'If you settle here, it means you are not going to go over Jordan to possess the land that God, in His sovereignty, has give you. You are not going to answer to the mind of God for you. If you do this, you will need to answer to your obligations. I will need to accede to your request but there are responsibilities that belong to you. First of all, you will go over and help your brethren to fight to obtain the land, and when you have done that, then you can come here and dwell in Gilead, but if you do not do that, be sure that your sin will find you out' (vv.6-23). Here the sin of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh was found out. They abode in Gilead. There was great resolve of heart on the part of Reuben.

I suppose you could imagine the elders of the tribe of Reuben saying, 'Oh, we must do something about this. Oh, we must go over to help our brethren. Oh, remember, we made a promise to Moses that we would do this kind of thing. Yes, we will need to gather our army together, get the spears ready, get the swords ready'; but they did not move an inch! There was great resolve of heart to do something but that was as far as it got. They never did a thing to help Barak and Deborah in this fight against the enemy. Well, this kind of thing can happen to Christians. How often has the Lord laid an exercise on our heart, perhaps to visit someone, perhaps to help someone, perhaps to give some tracts away, perhaps to do some form of service for Him, and we have had great resolve of heart. It seems so great to do this service for the Lord, but somehow or

other it is never done. The Bible says, "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Proverbs 13:4). When Deborah gave directions to Barak she said, 'Up, time to do something. Time to do this for the Lord. ' And here was Reuben, great resolve, great ideas, but nothing was accomplished. What a sad thing if that is true of us in our Christian experience.

".....and why did Dan remain in ships?" (Judges 5:17)

Why did Dan remain in ships? I suppose it was because he was too busy looking after his fishing or trading. I suppose he must have said something like, 'Well, I am too busy to be occupied with this battle. Let them get on with it. Zebulun and Naphtali are quite able to look after this affair, I have got to carry on my business, I have got to look after my affairs. This is righteousness. It does say that we are to be diligent in our business'. It is so easy to quote a scripture when it suits us, but here was a tribe who had the opportunity to serve the Lord, and they lost it, they abode in their ships, they looked after their own personal interests.

"Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches (creeks)" (Judges 5:17)

One gets the impression, 'Well I am sticking here, I could not care less, I am not really interested. I am abiding here; this is my place, my circle, my affair, and I am not interested in what is going on in this battle against Jabin and against Sisera'. When the time of commendation came, those who were really active were the persons who were worthy of it, and so we find "Zebulun and Naphtali were a people who jeopardised their lives unto the death in the high places of the field" (v.18). Naphtali means 'wrestling' (or 'concern' or 'exercise') and Zebulun means 'dwelling' (or 'habitation'). Here was Naphtali, a tribe who was true to its name, they were concerned, they were exercised. For us today it means we pray, we do what we can, we are concerned as to how we can promote the Lord's interests and make the local company better by our own personal exercise. We are always greatly concerned that somebody else might make it better. Brother so-and-so, sister so-and-so, they do not show much interest. We are always greatly concerned about them, perhaps rightly so; but how right it is to be deeply concerned oneself, and to make sure that we contribute in spiritual power and exercise in relation to the Lord's interests. So Zebulun and Naphtali were worthy of commendation. What a wonderful commendation Paul gives in the sixteenth chapter of Romans to men and women who were concerned about the work of the Lord. They laboured in the Lord, some laboured much in the Lord, and many other things, they were men and women who did much for the Lord's interests.

"They fought from heaven." or "From heaven was the fight." (Judges 5:31)

Now, if we had been left to our own resources here as Christians, the testimony of Christianity would have failed long ago. Thank God there are resources that come to us from heaven, where Christ is, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Php 4:19). "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me" (Php 4:13). There is strength and resource coming from heaven to help every Christian, whoever they might be, to do something for the Lord for maintenance of His interests, to fight against the enemy, the enemy that we seek to overcome - "From heaven is the fight".

"So let all Thine enemies perish" (Judges 5:31)

We would all say, 'Amen' to this. Thank God, when all the antichrists have gone, their power is overcome; thank God, when Christ rules in the world, supreme in the place that is rightfully His, when all enemies shall be under His feet. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43). How wonderful to look forward to that day. There is a time of victory, there is a time of reward, of commendation, and it will be when our glorious Head, our Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, the Man who will occupy the throne, the One who once occupied the cross, is supreme.

19. Gideon

Gideon The Twofold Enemy - the Midianites and the Unfaithfulness of Israel

"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; and I said unto you, I am the Lord your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice." (Judges 6:1-10) In these lectures concerning the days of the judges we have seen, again and again, Israel getting into difficulty because of their disobedience to the Lord. Here again we find the same story. There was a terrible condition in Israel because they disobeyed the Lord. Normal life was disrupted, they were living in caves and dens and strongholds, and the food supply was very, very scarce. The Midianites destroyed all that was sown and took all that they could get for themselves, and consequently Israel was impoverished. The Midianites were a very strong and resilient enemy. The name Midian means 'strife' or 'contention'. I do not think I need to say much more in this connection. How often we have seen amongst the people of God normal conditions in assembly life being disrupted because of strife and contention, with people seeking their own way, strong willed people making demands about things that ought never to be considered amongst the people of God; personal or family animosities, parties arising, and strife and contention existing amongst the saints of God. There is very little in the way of worship to the Father and the Son, there is very little in the way of testimony to the Lord or to the unconverted, and there certainly is precious little in the way of food supply. What the saints are asked to feed upon is strife and sorrow and backbiting and misrepresentation and cruelties of different kinds, and no spiritual growth is possible on this food. This was the kind of condition that Israel was in. There was no family life, all the business life of the nation was disrupted, and food supply was at a very low ebb. In such a condition we find the people were very much distressed, and it is a very good thing when the people do get distressed and cry aloud to God for some blessing and some help and some direction as to how to get out of their awful condition. We have seen it over and over again and we will consider this in these addresses on the book of Judges.

God is a faithful God and he sends a nameless prophet, and he tells the people the reason why they are in this condition, and as we have said in previous lectures, this was not because the Midianites were more powerful than the children of Israel, because when the children of Israel had God in their midst, and God fighting for them, it did not matter how great the enemy was, the battle was a foregone conclusion, God was with His people helping them. So often we find in the Old Testament words such as "the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47), and when the battle was the Lord's there was no enemy powerful enough to deal with the nation of Israel. The reason for their condition was their own unfaithfulness, their own disobedience to God's plain and distinct word to have nothing to do with idolatry but to have Himself enshrined in their affections. The last word of John's first epistle, "Children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21), is not a negative statement, it is a very positive statement, it simply means, 'I want the affections of My people for Myself, I do not want any interference from any other source.' This can be proved from the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy there are three distinct occasions when God describes Himself as a jealous God and the context in which He describes Himself in this way is each time connected with a warning to the people not to have anything to do with idols (4:23-24, 5:9, 6:13-15), in other words, God was jealous over the affections of His people. When John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said to the saints, "Children, keep yourselves from idols", John was saying to them, 'The Father and the Son want your love for themselves', and in view of all the wonderful truths that have been revealed, what a sad thing it is that the affections of the saints go astray after other things and prevent their enjoyment of these blessings, and prevent a response to the Father and to the Son. So the unnamed prophet told the nation very plainly that the reason for the prevailing condition was their own disobedience. It is very difficult for anyone to say today that there is one particular reason for failure amongst the people of God wherever they are found. I am very much aware that we are not the only Christian company that is experiencing difficulty. I have read in magazines and heard from other sources that all companies of Christians are experiencing the difficulty and declension that is marking this favoured land of ours. There may be isolated places where the Lord is blessing, thank God for that, but generally speaking, we all know something about the low condition of things that prevails. I think it would be right to say that in whatever way the declension is marked, and it may be different in different localities, we can all trace it to this one word - disobedience. In some way or another we have failed in relation to the word of God, either individually or collectively and if that is so we must expect the corresponding failure in testimony and in worship. It is inevitable. Divine things do not just work automatically, if there is failure in our obedience, then there must be failure in response. You might say this was a very despondent message, well this nameless prophet did not come along and say, 'Well, God is prepared to show you grace and love, He is a gracious God'. He did not come along to boost up their feelings and make everything nice when everything was not nice. The nameless prophet told the truth, and if we are told the truth we are well on the way to getting something done to repair the difficulties. Thank God, there was one man at least who was doing something to make the conditions better.

20. The Person of Gideon, the Fifth Judge

The Person of Gideon, the Fifth Judge

"And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die." (Judges 6:11-23)

It would seem that synchronising with the prophet's message there was this extremely active man, Gideon, in the secrecy of his father's home. He was threshing wheat in a winepress. We may think this is a very odd place to be threshing wheat, he ought to be in the threshing floor, well that was the normal place, but then Gideon was living in abnormal times. We have seen already in this book that many abnormal things were done. So here was Gideon threshing wheat in the winepress. One obvious reason for this is that there was no-one to gather in the harvest of the olives for the simple reason that the harvest did not exist, the Midianites had destroyed it; there were no olives to press in order to get the oil, or to be used for other purposes, the Midianites had destroyed all that was available. But there was some wheat, and Gideon was threshing it in order to hide it so that the Midianites might not obtain it. This man was very much concerned about some food being available for the people of God; a very useful kind of man to have in our companies today, a man who was concerned to provide real nourishing food for the people of God. I believe Paul was that kind of man, and he was a man of very great discernment. If the people of God required milk because of their spiritual condition he fed them with milk, if they were

capable of partaking of strong food then he fed them with strong food. In spiritual wisdom and discernment he fed them with the food that was convenient for them. We remember that the Lord asked the disciples at one juncture if they had any food, and they had not, they said, "There is a lad here, who hath five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" (John 6:9). Well it was certainly more than they had, and they were the 'great' disciples who had been so blessed by the Lord. They had not got anything to give, but the little boy had something, and when the Lord took it into His hands He expanded it so that a large multitude was fed. As one has so aptly said, 'Little is much, if the Lord is in it'. So Gideon was found threshing wheat, he was concerned about food being supplied. Dear brethren, are we concerned about providing something that is nourishing, something that is helpful for the saints in the Bible readings, in the ministry meetings, in addresses if the opportunity arises to address the saints of God? Are we concerned that they might have some real good food? The best food of all, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ, and if we can minister Him to the hearts of the saints and build up their affections and desires then we are doing a good work. He is the bread from heaven (John 6:30-59), the bread of God. If we want to have the enjoyment of eternal life as presented in John 6:1-71 it means that we feed upon Him, we eat His flesh and drink His blood. We are reminded too that we are to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). I believe this involves feeding upon Him, His glories, His Person, His work, everything connected with Him. This is real food, and builds up the affections of the saints. We want to beware of the kind of food that the sons of the prophets provided (2 Kings 4:38-41). It may have seemed a very nourishing meal when it was cooking, it might have been a very large meal, but it was a large meal sprinkled with some very poisonous gourds. There was "death in the pot", and he was the man who could rectify matters by casting in the handful of meal and what was poisonous was made nourishing. Today we have to beware of many sanctimonious statements which are made, but which are liberally sprinkled with quotations from the Scriptures and yet "there is death in the pot". It is not the truth and cannot stand the light of scripture. It is poisonous and evil and will not nourish the people of God.

Gideon was a man who was active, energetic, and was providing something worthwhile for the saints of God. It was to this kind of man that the angel of the Lord appeared and addressed in such a remarkable way, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour". Had he done anything outstanding to warrant such a description, a mighty man of valour? All that we know of him is that he was threshing wheat in this winepress. Was this a courageous, valiant thing to do? In the sight of God it was. It is so easy for us to look back and say, 'Oh, this or that servant of the Lord made a mistake. He ought to have been more intelligent. This or that servant of the Lord ought to have gone a little further, he did not know the full scope of the truth'. It is all right to say that when we do not know the circumstances in which these servants were operating. It is all right saying this when we are not aware of the awful conditions that prevailed at the time. It was a courageous, valiant thing to take a step out of the confusion and say something for the Lord.

We often say that the Reformation did not go far enough, that they ought to have gone a few steps further and got rid of many other things that were untrue, but how valiant those men were, how courageous! They risked their lives, their all, in fighting for what they knew to be the truth at that time. Let us think of what we might have done had we been in their position. Would we have risked our lives, our property, our loved ones by standing up for the truth in that day? I do not know if we

would have. We have to wait until we are in those circumstances before we can make positive statements as to how we react in them. Gideon was working in a very difficult time, the enemies were out to destroy everything, and he said, 'I am not going to let them. I am going to risk all that belongs to me in order to provide this food'. This is why the Lord said he was "a mighty man of valour". He said something else also, "The Lord is with thee".

If we have the time and look through a concordance and find all the persons who were addressed in this way, "The Lord is with thee", or those of whom it could be said, "The Lord was with them" we will find it an extremely interesting study, and pre-eminently this was so in connection with the Lord Jesus Himself. When Peter was preaching in the home of Cornelius in Acts 10:1-48 he said, "[Jesus] went about doing good..... for God was with him" (v.38). What a wonderful thing that is when God is with anyone; then he can be sure of support and power and blessing and fruitfulness. This always follows in the life of the servant of whom it can be said, "the Lord was with them".

Gideon's reaction to this was "if the Lord be with us.....". The angel did not say the Lord was with them, he said the Lord was with Gideon, not with the nation, but Gideon took it up as if it were the nation that was being referred to, and said, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?". 'Why, our fathers have told us of wonderful times and now we are in very, very bad conditions, why has this befallen us?' The Lord replied, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel". What was Gideon's might? It was the conscious sense that things were not what they ought to be, that things were different from what they used to be, and that there was the desire in his heart to do something to rectify them. You see, dear brethren, if we are conscious that in our own lives, and in the collective testimony, things are not as good as they used to be it will make us inquire why, and once we get to know we will be very much concerned, and prayer and energy will be spent in order to do something to make it better. But if we go along quite complacently saying, 'Well, everything is all right', and not be much concerned, I do not think things will get better. When we act as Gideon, then things are going to get better because the Lord is going to link up with us in our exercises. This is the kind of thing that He delights to see, and so Gideon is accredited as having strength and power because he actually felt, in a Godlike way, the conditions that prevailed.

Now Gideon replied, "O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee", whether the conditions are good or bad, here is the proper condition for any saint of God. The condition of humility before the Lord. It is easy to say this, but we have a nature in us that can feed on pride and prominence and pre-eminence and anything but humility. But all the men of God who have really done anything for the Lord have been men who have been marked by humility, none more than the Lord Himself. Php 2:5-11, that we so often read at the breaking of bread to describe the Lord coming down, was written by Paul under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to show the saints of God that they should be as He was when He was here in this world, and the two great features that come out in that passage are humility and obedience. He humbled Himself, He came down, made Himself of no reputation, took upon Him the form of a servant, and then became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The apostle prefaced what he said by the words, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus". We are to be humble, we are to be obedient; and these are the characteristics for every Christian who wants to be for God. Arrogance, pride and forcefulness, the assertion of our natures, have no place whatsoever in the

testimony of any who want to be for the Lord. And so Gideon is described here in this very, very commendable way, as a valiant man, the Lord is with him, and he is marked by humility.

21. Gideon - A True Worshipper

Gideon - A True Worshipper

"Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by, that he did it by night. And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar." (Judges 6:24-32)

Gideon knew something about peace in his heart. Certain things which had not been plain to him before were now very plain, also this commission that the Lord had given to him and the fact that the Lord had promised to be with him produced peace in his heart. There was this wonderful response before ever he was engaged in conflict with the enemy, he raised an altar to the Lord and worshipped. Worship is a very important part of Christian life. The Christian life is not all conflict, it is not always dealing with the difficulties and problems that beset us, worship is something to be done by each and every one of us, either individually or collectively, a responsive heart to the Lord who cares for us and who has blessed us in such a wonderful way. It is a remarkable thing that in the midst of a nation that had given itself up to idolatry here was one man who was immediately responding to the message he had received and he was worshipping the Lord.

Well, the altar of Baal cannot stand any longer. 'If I am going to worship the Lord' says Gideon, 'I must get rid of anything that is offensive to the Lord'. Gideon had been instructed that this was a real canker that was in the heart of the nation, this was the real cause of all the trouble, this altar that was reared to Baal, it was there right in his father's house, he knew about it only too well. So, at night, he knocked it down and destroyed it. There was great consternation the next morning, 'Who has done this awful thing, Knocked down the altar of Baal? Whoever it is needs to be punished!' As ever, whenever a man takes a stand over the truth there is always someone who will

come to support him. There is always fellowship, and this encouragement came from the right quarter, Gideon's father supported him. 'There is no-one here going to get killed' he said, 'Is it right or is it wrong that this altar should be thrown down, it is indisputable that it is an evil thing in our midst and my son has done right in throwing down this altar'.

Dear brethren, it is not enough just to do one thing and to be expert in what is right and proper before the Lord, it is also right to get rid of the offending things that God might not be offended, and this is exactly what Gideon did. He did what was right before the Lord in worshipping and he did that which was right before the Lord in removing the rival to the Lord's affections in destroying the altar of Baal. There are certain things that we cannot have any tolerance of, indeed to have tolerance with this kind of thing is tantamount to treason to the Lord. We cannot trifle with Baal, he is in opposition to God; we cannot do anything with him in grace and love, it is impossible, he will never change. The Midianites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, all these enemies of the Lord will never change, they never get better, they are fixed in their determination to oppose the things of God. Showing grace and love never alters them, they have to be ruthlessly dealt with and removed, and this is what Gideon did, he threw down the altar of Baal and raised up a standard for the Lord.

Now in verse 34 we read that, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon". It is quite interesting that in the book of Judges which deals with so much that is of a dark character there are more references to the Spirit of the Lord in it than in any other book in the Old Testament. Samson, Othniel, Gideon and many others had the Spirit of the Lord come upon them in times of difficulty. How thankful we are for the wonderful truth that we possess, that the Spirit of the Lord indwells us individually and is with us collectively, and He will never be taken from us, He is with us to the end, the Lord's promise is that, "He shall abide with you forever" (John 14:16), right to the end of the Christian testimony. This is the real resource of the people of God at all times to deal with all that is offensive to God. He is the Spirit of truth, He in His Divine power and greatness and glory can detect error when we can be hoodwinked. He can reveal to us what is really wrong in teachings that are offensive to God and to Christ, and He is the power that enables us to stand for the Lord in an evil day when false doctrines are increasing on every hand.

22. Gideon Defeats the Midianites

Gideon Defeats the Midianites

"But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him....." (Judges 6:33-40; Judges 7:1-25; Judges 8:1-3)

Here were people in his own locality gathering to his standard. He sounded the clear distinct note. "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8). Well, Gideon gave a clear sound, blowing a trumpet, giving a signal to all concerned that there was something being done, now not only a food supply being provided, thank God for that, but now a very determined effort to get rid of the bondage of the Midianites. In Numbers 31:1-54 we find that God said He would have vengeance on Midian (v.2). That is what God said. God was determined that Midian should have no part with the people of God and He determined that they would not interrupt the blessings of the people. So, just as He said against Amalek and against Moab and against Ammon, God declared His hatred of all that belonged to the Midianites. So here the standard was being raised, but it goes a bit further, in verse 35 Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali gathered to the standard too. We are very glad to see our friends Zebulun and Naphtali here again, they were prominent in the revival in Deborah's and Barak's day, they jeopardised their lives in the high places, prepared to lay down their lives to defend what belonged to God, and here they are in the forefront again. This is a very fine thing to see, consistency in the desire to maintain what belongs to the Lord. Now this trumpet call led to this army of 32,000 that was going to meet the Midianites. This was quite a useful army to have, but Gideon had a few lessons to learn yet. One of them was that God does not necessarily work by large numbers, neither is He committed to work with large numbers, "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). God can save by a few as well as by many. We are reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:27 "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty", and the many other statements that Paul made in that connection, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). There we find this wonderful history portrayed for us. These two verses fit exactly with this story of Gideon and his army of 32,000 men. How was Gideon going to use them? How would he deploy them in order to meet the great army? Well, God says, 'Speak to them and tell those who are timid or fearful to go home because such people are not of much use in the day of battle', such people turn back. So Gideon told them what God had told him and 22,000 turned back and went home. This considerably reduced the army, from 32,000 to 10,000. 'Never mind, we might be able to do something with 10,000' says Gideon, but God said, 'Gideon, take them down to the river and just see how they drink, and I will tell you the ones that you are to take'. And then the army was drastically reduced.

There were now only 300 out of the original 32,000, but God had said He would be with Gideon and the enemy would be destroyed, and when God starts to work it does not matter that there are only 300 against a vast army, the battle is already won. This was the lesson that Gideon had to

learn, that it is not necessarily large numbers that indicate the power of God. Unfortunately people have often been governed by this sort of thing in our meetings. Twenty or thirty are too small for some people, they want hundreds, thousands and so they leave little companies; the principle does not matter so long as there are large numbers of people and plenty of activity. But the Lord is quite happy if there are twos and threes who go on with the truth. I am not putting any premium on the fact of small numbers, we do need adequate numbers to carry on an adequate testimony. There is no particular virtue in that we are only two or three, it might be our own folly or our own weakness that numbers are reduced to such small quantities, but we can be sure of this, that if there are two or three or two dozen or thirty or forty who very humbly and very genuinely maintain the truth as it has been revealed to them in the Scriptures then they will know in a very real way the presence of the Lord. They will know His power and they will know His blessing. This is the lesson that Gideon had to learn. It was not in his power, it was not in the largeness of the army, it was in the power of the Lord, it was in His ability to direct and to control, to win the victory.

Gideon was a man who always wanted to be sure, and we have four occasions when he asked the Lord for guidance, and the Lord showed to him that everything was all right. Firstly there were Gideon's two signs in connection with the fleece, and then his desire to the angel to have it revealed to him who it was that was speaking to him, and then lastly the Lord directed him to go down into the camp of Midian, there he heard of the dream of one of the men, and the dream was that a little barley cake rolled into the camp and overturned the tents. The man woke up and said, "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon" (v.15). They knew the battle was lost, that they were to be defeated. A little barley cake is not a strong looking thing, a humble instrument. I believe that the Lord was just indicating to Gideon how small he was personally - a little barley cake, that was God's way of showing Gideon that it was the Lord who was fighting the battle and the victory was a foregone conclusion.

Gideon took his three companies and he provided them with their equipment for fighting this battle. It was a peculiar arrangement, he put into their hands a trumpet, and a clay pitcher and inside the pitcher a lighted torch. What a queer arrangement to fight a battle with. This is God's arrangement and Gideon obeys. The three hundred were divided into three companies, and now he said, 'When I give the signal, you do what I do, you follow me'. This is the language of a man who was leading the saints of God in a positive way, he was sure of his ground, he knew what he was going to do, and he directed the people to do what he was doing. So the appropriate moment came, the trumpet was sounded, the three hundred created quite a noise, three hundred trumpets blaring at one time, the pitchers were smashed, the torches shone forth and the Midianites fled for their lives. The battle was won, a great slaughter resulted, and princes were killed. God had fulfilled His word, the enemy was overthrown. We turn to 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 and we get the explanation of all this. Paul says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (v.7), the earthen vessels are the pitchers, these weak bodies of ours in which indwells all the precious things that God has placed there in view of testimony for Himself. This is the testimony, the trumpet sounds, the testimony that is to go forth contained in weak vessels, but when these vessels are broken, that is, when they are humbled under the hand of the Lord and kept there, there is an adequate testimony to meet all the power of Satan and to defeat his armies. Dear brethren, we are all poor, weak creatures in ourselves, but under the hand of the Lord if we can keep humble and allow Him to work with us, then an adequate testimony will be rendered for His pleasure and for His glory.

There are always grumblers, and we find that after the battle was won, there were some who came to Gideon and they complained to him saying, 'Why did you not come for us?' When the trumpet had been blown, they would have heard it. I do not think there was any question about that, but they did not come when the trumpet was blown, so Gideon and those whom God chose carried on and the victory was theirs. It was all right to come in at the end and make complaints, but Gideon was not a man of forceful spirit, and here he gives a beautiful example of a soft answer turning away wrath (Proverbs 15:1) and instead of causing frustration amongst his brethren, or causing them to be in animosity towards him, he won them for his cause.

23. The Failure of Gideon

The Failure of Gideon

"Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you. And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks. And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house." (Judges 8:22-27)

It is a very sad thing when a man of God goes astray. It is a terrible thing. This man of God who broke down the altar of Baal in his own home and who was used of God in such a marvellous way, was then led by the people to make an ephod "and all Israel went a whoring after it", it was a snare unto the children of Israel. This is very, very sad. It reminds us, dear brethren, that we need to be kept every inch of the way, right to the very end. There is not a moment when we can afford to lapse in vigilance. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). George Muller of Bistol, a wonderful man of faith, prayed right to the day he died, 'Lord, preserve me from being a wicked old man'. He knew the wickedness of the flesh, he knew what it was in his unconverted days to be led by Satan, and he did not want to return to that, so his continual prayer was that he might be kept. So the fact that we might have been successful at some moment in our lives for the Lord does not mean that we will be immune from temptation or failure, we need to be kept right to the end. I believe that sweet word of Peter is something we can lay hold of if we are humble and leave ourselves in the Lord's hands "kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5). How wonderful it is to look back over our lives and trace all the way the Lord has kept us, we certainly could not have kept ourselves. May these few remarks on the life of this man of God be an encouragement for us in our day, that we might go on, provide food for the saints, make sure we provide plenty for ourselves first and build up our own souls and so be a help to others, for His name's sake.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net