# Judges and Ruth

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## The Book of Ruth

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# PREFACE

The following pages, reprinted from "Our Hope" make no pretension to being anything more than an endeavor to discern the practical application to the present day of the incidents recorded in the book of *Judges*.

It is becoming increasingly in accord with modern thought to regard these early books of the Bible, if not as purely mythical, yet as giving us nothing more than an interesting, but by no means divine, record of an ancient people; — a record having all the inaccuracies and meaningless incidents that might be expected from a nation in its infancy. If this is all they are, it is quite plain that, far from any divine value, they really possess *less* than many human productions.

Prof. A. H. Sayce in his recent little booklet, "Monument Facts and Higher Critic Fancies," contends for archaeological evidence as being far more trustworthy as confirmative of Old Testament narratives, than the philological process of the critics is destructive. I will not dispute the justice of this contention; but I would certainly add that this is altogether inadequate to meet the profound need of the human spirit, which longs to discover not merely the truth of historical facts — but a worthy motive — a *divine* motive — for the recording of those facts. Archaeology may tell us of the same facts; may discover to us, for example, other accounts of the Deluge — than that recorded in the Bible, and so far it may be of a certain value in meeting a certain class of difficulties to some minds; but this does not give in itself one jot or tittle of evidence of *God* being the Author of Scripture, any more than that He is the Author of the potteries which archaeology presents to us. But it is *this* that our spirits cry aloud for now. Instinctively we feel it is what ought to be. Show me an intention far deeper than any

within the power of a human author; an intention, or design, as clear in the Word as in the Work, as worthy of God, and that could be attributable to Him alone; a design that shows that the Author foresaw our far-off day, and so governed this record that it gave a figure of that day — I rest content; it is *God's Word.*

Now it is this that I am convinced is in the book of Judges. It is a record of events so written, as not only to be faithful history, but pictorial prophecy. Nor are we left merely to our own subjective impressions, or instinctive feelings of what "ought to be." Scripture itself plainly teaches that all that happened to this wonderful people happened to them for types and were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have arrived (1 Cor. 10). Nor can we believe that all typical significance of what happened to Israel *ends* in their desert journeys. Their failure in the land, their captivities, their deliverances; are not these too, typical? Is not this too, written for us? If this can be clearly shown, then is the book not merely a true human record of historical facts, such as archaeology may prove, but divine, and who pray, will then *need* proof? Who would not blush to ask it?

The simplest soul under the Spirit's teaching, though he may be quite ignorant of all the "ologies," may hear a living voice in this word that he at once recognizes as his Father's — note with admiration the wisdom far beyond that of any man, and his heart may rest confident and calm, amid all the vain attacks of the enemy to shake its confidence. This alone will keep any, in the awful apostasy that is even now clearly beginning, is indeed already sweeping crowds of lifeless professors in the churches away from the foundation truths of Christianity, and is preparing a way for the manifestation of the "man of sin"(2 Th. 2).

Profoundly convinced thus of the real Author of the book,

I have been prepared, first, to find evidence of this purpose even in every name recorded, for indeed at times there has been little else but names. It is only just to own in this connection how much I am indebted to others, and especially to that beloved servant of Christ, the late Mr. F. W. Grant, who, of all writers with whom I am acquainted, has made the most spiritually intelligent study of the value of Hebrew names, combining as he did the necessary scholarship with the even more necessary keen spiritual insight. May others, if the Lord tarry, similarly gifted, be raised up to follow him, for there "is still much land to be possessed" in this way.

Secondly, I have written from the standpoint of the ecclesiastical conditions ruling today. If the book of Judges furnishes any figures of the Church, then we stand at what answers to the end of that book. Romanism has evidenced its awful apostasy, Protestantism its woeful impotency through worldly conformity; but beyond this, and perhaps more pathetically, not only have we seen the complete failure of revival after revival, but particularly of that latest movement that commenced almost simultaneously in various places and countries about seventy-five years ago, in the recognition of the oneness of the Church as the Body of Christ, and the consequences that resulted from this. A movement that began with the discovery of the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the gathering Center of all His people: delight in occupation with Himself, being combined with a spirit of brotherly love that included every clearly recognized member of His Body; but which has resulted in arriving in a few years (to the shame and sorrow of all true souls), at practically the same condition of multiplied divisions and sectarian strife as the very denominations it condemns!

A third point, and still connected with this I may note, is the evidence that all this gives of the near coming of the Lord

Jesus Christ. That we are nearing the end is the conviction of almost every thoughtful Christian; a conviction that a study of this book tends to confirm. We are living in the days of Samson as a blind captive. May we be able too, to see more clearly "his hair beginning to grow again" in a spirit of sincere, personal, lowly self-judgment. I would venture earnestly to ask my readers' special attention to this closing life in the book as being of direct personal interest to themselves.

Finally, whilst feeling compelled to point out the present failures that correspond to those in the book, as far as light has been granted, I am well assured if we would have God's smile, that we must not "separate ourselves" from any of our brethren as having no part in those failures — we are one with them, and thus I have sincerely sought to avoid anything like a spirit of controversy in any way. Yet with *parties* as such, or sectarian companies, we can seek no affiliation, friendship, nor peace, being well assured that they are contrary to Scripture, utterly dishonoring to Christ the Head, and filled with pernicious effects and dangers to His one beloved flock. With such convictions, would not true love to that flock — to our brethren — necessitate opposition to all *parties* down to the very end?

And now I would still commend this little book to Him who has permitted its completion, with a note of praise for this mercy, with an unfeigned confession of its unworthiness, and yet with a prayer that He may use that in it which is the fruit of His own grace, to His glory, and the help and refreshment of His people.

F.C.J.

Plainfield, N.J., June, 1905.

## Chapter 1

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

We shall find this very much neglected book to be one of peculiar interest and value for our day. It begins with the Lord's people asking as to who shall go up first to fight the Canaanites; it ends with exactly the same question, only the foe is no longer external, but their own brother Benjamin! How serious must have been the declension between the two incidents! The question of chronology is of small importance; it is not an easy one to determine; but morally these two incidents evidently begin and end the book. Could anything more clearly cry out to us in language impossible to misinterpret that there is indeed "nothing new under the sun?" Like the waters that "run into the sea; yet the sea is not full: unto the place from whence the rivers come thither they return again" (Eccl. 1:7), so the history of man revolves and repeats itself: declining and degenerating constantly, till some gracious divine work again lift up for another trial.

Thus we clearly get the key of the book in these two verses in chapter 1:1, and chapter 20:18:

"who shall go up for us against the *Canaanites* first, to fight against them?" And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up."

"Which of us shall go first to the battle against the *children of Benjamin?*" And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up first."

We shall trace the path between these two points: a descent like that from "Jerusalem to Jericho," not uninterrupted, but crossing many a healthy mountain range, as, by the

Lord's sovereign mercy, it rises above the low mists and swamps of unbelief, and goes over some fair upland of faith, *where a "worthy one" has his dwelling place: a Gideon, a* Barak, a Jephthah; but each succeeding upland a little less elevated than its predecessor, each bearing fruit a little more earthly flavored, a little less heavenly; whilst each marsh that follows is lower, ever lower, and filled with a more noisome miry clay of a deeper apostasy than the one before.

Here then may we trace, in type and shadow, the course of God's beloved heavenly people; and here too may we, dear reader, often find but too clear a picture of our own individual path; and, if we but take in what God's love would have us apprehend, we may perhaps be saved some sorrows, and have our hearts awakened to some little melody of praise, as even here we trace how with a mercy, and with a judgment, which is no less mercy, every step of our way has been cared for, and even now we bless the Hand that guides and the Heart that plans. May He grant it for His own praise!

"Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass." The book of Joshua had begun in exactly the same way: "Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass;" but then the mantle falls on another "servant of the Lord," who carries on the Lord's work in the power and spirit of Moses. But now there appears to be none. The people are left for a time to themselves; how will they walk? Gradually the wheels stop revolving, the machine goes on by the momentum of a past energy for some time, but every revolution is a little less quick, till it ceases entirely — the energizing power is gone. The second chapter of Revelation shows us exactly the same state; only there we are told the cause of the declining of the fire that is going out: first-love left; the Lord Jesus is no longer the One Object of the heart's affections; and *anything* may follow then.

Judah indeed "goes up," but he goes not up *first alone*, but seeks the aid of this brother Simeon. Is not this a suggestion *of weakness of faith? Did it not show a lack of simple* confidence in Jehovah? Is it that *He* did not quite suffice? It is but a straw, but it indicates the drift of the tide; for even my brother can really add nothing to *His* almighty arm, who alone giveth victory, and there is a dependence on brethren that is not of faith at all — an *independence* even of them, that is the independence of faith, not flesh. Take communion with God over His Word. Here it is often necessary to be *absolutely alone with Him; to ask no human aid in the* solution of difficulties, but bring them directly to Him; and there is never lacking "reward" in this. How often do the very difficulties turn to beauties when seen in the holy light of the sanctuary. This is much needed today. It is indeed not good to despise or neglect ministry; but every believer, every single one, *you, my reader, should see to it that some portion of each day be spent alone with God.* Our fathers who have passed off the scene, had their own peculiar needs; and in waiting on God alone were those needs met. We now have ours, and not by merely reading their writings can we meet them. God, the living God, is alone "our dwelling place in all generations," and they who know nothing of such whispers of love direct from God our Father through His holy Word, not only miss a blessed element in their individual life for which nothing can compensate, but lose opportunities, and capacities for usefulness to the Flock of Christ, that can never again recur. Alas! if one may speak for others, we all sadly and too often fail, in seeking help from "our brother Simeon."

We know well there is an opposite danger: a carnal independence due to pride or vanity. At times all the tribes were to go up together: each giving aid to all — there is a sense in which each believer is dependent on all, as members

of One Body, but even this is in complete and common dependence of each one on the Head; but this is not the case here; Judah's trust is in Simeon, as in contrast with Jehovah.

For do we not see the fruit that springs from this root in verse 19: "Judah (helped? by *Simeon*) could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley *because they had chariots of iron.*" Judah has in some little measure questioned or rejected Jehovah's infinite strength, and in so doing has limited his own victories. "Chariots of iron" are too much for him. We shall see later they are not of much account before the Lord, but they are irresistible to any human strength, and in proportion as we rely on it shall we find a limitation — an unnecessary limitation — to our victories in some "chariots of iron." For "iron," we are divinely told, is a figure of that which is irresistible: "Iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things" (Dan. 2:40). There is but One Arm that can break "iron;" but to Him iron is no more than "the chaff of the summer threshing floor" (Dan. 2:35).

But we must see more clearly the high-water mark of Israel's faith that we may better appreciate the subsequent ebb of the tide; hence there is a repetition of incidents in the earlier history of Judah under Joshua — exploits that the Lord never wearies of repeating; as He says by another pen, "Time would fail" Him, if He said all He thought of these evidences of the confidence of man's heart in Himself. Again we are told of Caleb's victory over the sons of Anak, of Othniel's triumph, of Achsah's request, all clearly expressive of our Lord's keen appreciation of the strong confidence in Himself these evidenced — the high water mark of faith.

See Caleb, "the whole hearted," as his name means, over fourscore years old; but those years are not to him "labor and sorrow," but, drawing from an inexhaustible Spring of Life, the same fresh vigor is his now as at twoscore, and he boldly

claims as his, the very stronghold of the sons of Anak, and dispossesses them. In the flesh, I suppose, Caleb may have shown the usual signs of age characterizing the first man; but his strength is elsewhere, and that Arm never weakens or wearies. If we faint and grow weary it is because faith weakens; because we are confiding in an arm of flesh, and we need once more, like Peter, to be "converted," i.e., thoroughly turned from self-confidence to self-distrust, and a *glorying in our infirmities that the power of Christ may rest* upon us.

"Othniel" too takes "Kirjath-sepher," which is by interpretation "the city of the book," turning it into "Debir," a living "oracle." Exactly what faith does with God's Word. To the first man it is but a book, he would treat it "as any other book;" to the ear of faith it is the living voice of the living God. There is still room for Othniels in our day.

For men of science, falsely so-called, are making a very specious plea that the Bible must be treated, in all fairness, as any other book; that is, in their hands it is simply "Sepher," "a book" and nothing more.* It is, they tell us, nothing but bigotry and blind superstition, to accord it a reverence that would interfere with an impartial criticism of it. But all hangs on the term "impartial criticism." This, in itself, needs to be clearly evidenced according to its claim. For, as a matter of fact, from the very nature of the case, what we call

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*And not only men of science, as the following will show:

"It is therefore wrong and misleading to argue that we have no other way of ascertaining the mind of the Spirit concerning our salvation, or our duty towards our fellows except through the written word . . . The living, active, positive agency of God is comparatively shut out of the world, and *a dead book* placed in its stead."

Quoted from p. 3 of a book entitled "The Doctrines of the Salvation Army. Prepared for the use of Cadets in Training for Officership, *by the General*. Fifth edition, 1903," in "The Morning Star" of October, 1904.

"criticism" (unless confined to its proper sphere of what is *confessedly human, as copying, translating, etc.),* is quite impossible, and that simply because the book is on its very surface not like "any other book," in its claims, its effects, its majesty, or its unity, diversity, and harmony. It would be equally fitting for criminals to subject their judge to the same "impartial criticism" as one of themselves; or children their father.

The written Word is exactly as was the Living Word in the days of His flesh; and when men of that day, in similar vein, would have criticized Him, as any other man, with "impartiality" as they would doubtless, with natural self-complacency claim, they invariably, and with painful humiliation, learned their error. They approached to judge *Him,* they always departed judged *by* Him. Exactly so now; poor, vain, sinful man — cover him up with all the honors the universities can heap upon him, they are but as effective to hide his nakedness as Adams' fig-leaves — approaches the Word to judge it, and think to hide his folly and presumption under the word "impartial." A nature at enmity with God, can never be impartial in the things of God. The Word judges, exposes, lays bare his inmost heart, speaks a thundering conviction of this to his conscience; and, since it knows and tells what God only knows, proves beyond a peradventure that it is divine.

The Book is God's Word, or a miraculous fraud. It is either Our Father's Voice, or a supernatural deception. It is *not* a good book, if not divine, for it claims to be this. If it be divine, He who is then its Author, can make that fact clear *at once* to true "impartiality"; and at once an attitude of reverence and submission not criticism (except indeed I would repeat of the work of the men, to whom it has been entrusted; and here it should be the more thankfully received, the more

thorough it is) is the only becoming one for a reasonable *creature*.

Nor will it do to say that it is in order that we may be able to discover this, that we come to it as to "any other book." It was in this way, to continue the analogy, that men argued with regard to the living Word. The Light shone before them in its own unique beauty and brightness; manifesting, exposing, healing, blessing; and they come and ask a sign that it *was* the Light (Luke 10). What does the very question involve? Clearly a disease of *their* eye. Suppose a man, on some bright day, ask a sign that the sun is shining, would not one at once look carefully at *his* eyes, assured that they were seriously diseased. So says the Lord. "The lamp of the body is the eye, therefore when thine eye is single (i.e., morally sound) thy whole body shall be full of light, but when thine eye is evil (i.e., morally diseased) thy whole body is full of darkness." And he to whom the Word does not speak its own divinity may well have profound anxiety as to his own moral condition. It is he that is judged, not the Word, and no veil of pretended "impartiality" shall avail to hide the moral disease.

"Kirjath-Sepher, the city of the book," becomes thus, in Faith's hands, "Debir, the living oracle." And let none presume to say that this is credulity or superstition, but Faith, and the distinction is as between death and life. The truest, highest Reason rejects the former as beneath its feet; approves the latter; even because it goes far beyond her own powers. "It is meet and right," she says, "that God, to be God, should be infinitely above me, and must reveal Himself, not as contrary indeed, but as beyond my powers to compass, and in that case, woe to those who refuse to see." "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. 4:3).

Then Achsah with her requests for further gifts, that sound

so bold; but which God never counts presumptuous, but seems to appreciate as we appreciate the precious gift itself, for it puts Him in the more blessed place of the Giver. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." Yes, and does He not love the confident "asker," too? Indeed He does, and they are very closely related, for the "confident asker" is father of the "cheerful giver." No one can be the latter, who has not first been the former. This is a very precious secret; that faith can never be too bold. In other words, God's child can never *expect* too much from His Father. "He that spared not His own Son" . . . what is the deduction? He surely will give us nothing else. Such a gift prevents anything else. "Nay, but will He not also freely give us *all things?*" So faith argues always and quite reasonably, as one of our own poets sings:

> Thou that hast given so much to me,
> Give one thing more — a thankful heart.
> See how Thy beggar works on Thee
> By art.
> He makes Thy gifts occasion more,
> And says, If he in this be crosst,
> All Thou has given him heretofore
> Is lost.

"Thou has given me a Southland, give me also springs of water" — and she gets them: both upper and nether springs. Oh, beloved reader, do we know that in Christ we have a lovely Southland, a land of sunshine and of warmth, a land of fruitfulness and beauty; but we must have that which shall enable us to enjoy it. We must have the upper and nether springs, the fountains both from the uplands and the valleys. Does not our own dear apostle Paul refer to these very springs when he says, "I know both how to abound," that is the "*upper spring*" when all is well, and the sun of prosperity and abundance shines full upon me; when I am on the mountain

top, where glorious far-reaching views on every side and the health-giving air are responded to by an exhilaration of joyousness within, it is the "upper spring." But Paul has another spring, for he adds, "I know how to suffer need." That is the "*nether spring*," speaking of lack and need and emptiness, when God takes His dear child by the hand, and leads him down perhaps at first with tear-dimmed eye into the valley of humiliation, where lowly flowers grow, and quiet waters run. For do not all these make our Lord Jesus more precious? And is He not the true Source of all refreshment? Yes, indeed, in his Field — Christ — Paul found "upper and nether springs" sources of perfect satisfaction in whatsoever state he was. Never need Achsah go outside her "Field;" she could build her house there and abide in it. Have you and I yet learned that we are "*complete in Him*," and our only need is to know that He fills *all* need and to "*abide in Him*"?

In this happy and blessed three, Caleb, Othniel, and Achsah, we get then the high water mark of Israel's faith. Now mark the ebbing tide in failures on all sides to drive out the Canaanites, the old dwellers in the land. Here is the first-fruits of timid unbelief. And has there been no counterpart of this in 'us on whom the ends of the world have come'? Have not the Lord's people from the first left Canaanites undisturbed?

The word means "Merchant" or "Trafficker" and is so translated in the Scriptures. What are Canaanites but selfish worldly principles opposed to God and overcome only by faith? Since Canaan was own brother to Mizraim, which is Egypt (Gen. 10:6), and Egypt is the type of nature fallen from, and in independence of, God, so are these principles closely allied to those *natural* fleshly lusts that govern the natural man, only here they are seen in connection with the *new* man. This is the only difference. They are fleshly principles in the Lord's people, which must henceforth be

kept in the place of death, or they will bring *us* into bondage, one or the other. "Mortify therefore your members that are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." All these will keep us out of our "towns," the enjoyment of some phase of Christ, some beauty in Him that belongs to us, till at length we are again bondsmen: not in Egypt again it is true, but in our own land; children of God in captivity to some worldly principle that destroys our true freedom. Oh, how true and real the antitype has been! How soon did the Lord's people come into bondage to this or that form of darkness and error! The course of our book will tell us in type and figure, as the epistles, and especially those of the Lord from heaven to the seven churches, will tell in fact and prophecy, and the sad history of the Church; and, more or less our own individual experiences, will emphasize the sad truth, that as we have already noted the history in this scene, where everything revolves, ever repeats itself. The failures and sins of the people in the land are only shadows of the same evil fruit, the same failures, the same sins that have characterized the Church of Christ, in its responsible character as a testimony on the earth; and, forever, blessed be God, the grace again and again met those failures of old, has been no less active in reviving His people during that long age now hastening to a close. May that grace be with us as we consider the book further.

## Chapter 2

# BOCHIM

The second chapter of our book opens with a most significant word: "And the angel of the Lord came up from *Gilgal to Bochim.*"

Now this change of position on the part of the angel of the Lord is evidently pregnant with the deepest meaning. We are never told of such matters but that we may learn more than appears on the surface. If the Lord Jesus goes out to the seaside and preaches, (Mt. 13:1) the scene of the delivery of *the address is scarcely less important than the address itself. If* He retires into the house (v. 36), after He has sent the throng away, it is because what He now has to say is adapted to this changed position, as being confidential, and giving the divine side of things. So here, "the angel of Jehovah" is surely none other than Jehovah Himself, in that angelic form that speaks somewhat of distance and formality. He has been, throughout the history of Joshua, at *Gilgal.* There the tribes rest after every victory; there they renew their strength for further triumphs. But Israel has left Gilgal. No tribes gather there now; it is a neglected spot, and He too leaves it.

But of what then does Gilgal speak? There "the reproach of Egypt was rolled away" (Josh. 5); there all confidence in the flesh came to an end, and there began a glorying in the Lord that meant both present joy and further victory. Gilgal, then, figures the cross of Christ, where "our old man was

crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed," leaving the new man free for work, and watch, and victory. Alas that the Lord's people should leave so glorious a spot; but they *did*; not only in the day of Israel after the flesh, but in this day of grace, and once more man in the flesh claims a standing before God — he is not dead. Gilgal is departed from, and now, for us as for them, Bochim is where the angel of the Lord is to be found.

It is strange, yet sorrowfully true, that we may have so learned the lesson of Gilgal as to think we can nevermore leave it, and yet there is such a steady constant tendency in the flesh to self confidence that, before we know it, another painful and humiliating experience awakens us to the fact that we too have again left Gilgal. It is the lesson of our lifetime; not once learned and never forgotten, but by the Love that was ours before the foundation of the world, we learn to make longer stays at Gilgal — till, as "the Fathers" in 1 John 2, we only "know Him that is from the beginning," *abide* in Him; and in happy occupation of heart and mind with Him, leave the old "I" to utter forgetfulness.

But what then is Bochim? It means "The weepers." It is the home of the weepers. What a contrast with Gilgal, the home of joyful song and happy boasting in Christ. But still the angel of the Lord is there, at Bochim. Could then Israel go to a better place? Nay, it was a call for them to go there, and there only. May we not be well assured that it is the place for us too today? and it will be well for any who by grace may find their way to the place of the *weepers*. You will meet no "man of the world" there. It is not a popular spot, especially in this day of man's boasting in himself, and of the glorious progress of the end of the century. You may have to bear the stigma of that modern term of reproach, "pessimist." Never mind, you will still have little cause to complain, or to be

ashamed of the company you will find there; and it may encourage us to glance at a few of those who have, in their day, pitched their tent at Bochim.

It lies in the way, indeed, that "the flock" have mostly gone. Look at that lovely 84th Psalm. It tells us of some who, passing through the Valley of Baca, i.e., of weeping (for I doubt not it is from the same root as Bochim), make it a place of springs, the rain also covereth it with blessings (R.V.). These are, as it were, pilgrims in Bochim; but the angel of the Lord is there with them, and springing waters and heaven's blessings show that God is once more keeping gracious company with such pilgrims.

Look at another very distinguished dweller at Bochim in his day. See that aged captive in Babylon, with windows opened toward the beloved city of his fathers, and with a scroll of Jeremiah before him, praying, supplicating, and confessing — humbling himself in every way and with no formal heart, or dry eye. May we not say he too was at Bochim, and that the angel of the Lord met him there? Oh how the Lord showed *His tender and strong appreciation of this dweller in Bochim*, "the man greatly beloved," and again "for thou art greatly beloved." Surely, surely this is strong encouragement to seek quarters in this favored spot.

Nor did our blessed Lord Himself avoid the place; but when He marked the enemy's apparent — although temporary — triumph in the death-shade that overhung the fair scene of God's creation — saw the tears falling about him on every hand — He too enters Bochim, as we may say, for "Jesus wept." Shall *we* be ashamed to be found there?

Following closely in the footprints of his Lord comes our own dear apostle Paul, who often finds himself led to Bochim, as he sees the beautiful building of God already

crumbling into ruins, and writes, even "weeping," of the enemies of the cross of Christ; or from Bochim addresses a letter to Corinth, with its evils and dangers, "with many tears." Indeed a stay at Bochim will introduce us to most excellent company.

It is no modern city of mushroom growth, for turn to Ezekiel 9. Six men are seen with slaughter-weapons in their hands; but one amongst them, clothed in linen, has a writer's ink-horn, and to him the Lord speaks: "Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." Are they not dwellers in Bochim, who, in the midst of apostasy, are morally separate from it, and who shame not to weep?

But we must remember that Bochim is no place of accusation of any saints. He who accuses his brethren is no dweller there. No mere railer at the evils amid the Lord's blood-bought flock, no wicked person who thus holds it up to the reproach of the world is a true Bochim-dweller. The voice of accusation of our brethren is quite silent at Bochim.

And is not Bochim a peculiarly fitting place for us at this day? Oh, beloved reader, look around. Be not deceived by the boastful cries of progress, of civilization, nay even of church activity you may hear on all hands, but bring the scene that will meet your eye to the standard of God's Word and see how it will endure the test. Mark the true children of God, not "gathered together in one," as far as outward eye sees, but scattered in various folds of human construction, each having its own fencing to keep out other sheep, each its own "shibboleth." And then look at that other scene in the bright, cloudless dawning of our day, when not one that believed was in the slightest degree separate from another, when they were all of one accord, when love drew Greek to Barbarian,

Roman to Jew, as brethren, and simply because they *were* brethren. Alas, now none appear more bitterly opposed than those who adopt that peculiarly lovely inclusive and exclusive name; inclusive of all that evidences the family character of light and love; exclusive of all that denies that character. Is not Bochim a fitting place for us?

Look at the success of our enemy in another way. You and I remember the day, perhaps, when the Bible was at least externally reverenced almost universally as the very Word of God, even by those who might still be disobedient to it. Now its authority is denied by "doctors of divinity," and "reverend" gentlemen cut it in pieces — as did King Jehoiakim, Jeremiah 36:23 — with their little knives, and would fain cast it to the flames, till the "laity" know no longer whether they have anything that can be truly called a revelation from God at all, or anything sure on which to rest, and all its authority over conscience is fast being nullified. What wonder that the Lord's beloved sheep are open on all sides to teachings that under the fairest words, deny atonement, ridicule the need of propitiation, dishonor the holy Person of the Lord Jesus, insist on the sleep of the soul, the annihilation of the impenitent, or the universal salvation of both believers and unbelievers and a hundred other extravagances and fancies; whilst they only are counted "charitable" who can, with sublime impartiality, take them *all* in.

Ah what may not happen when the fear of God is gone? Look out for horrors that shall go beyond anything that has yet been seen by this blood-soaked, tear-soaked earth, when man not merely turns from the dim twilight he had from nature, as in the days of old, but when the brilliant midsummer-sun of a perfect revelation is turned from and extinguished; surely then shall be "great tribulation, such as

was not since the beginning of the world."

Shall we not too find a strong call to Bochim in the worldliness of the Lord's people? See how that aged corruptress, the "World," has brought all her filthy ways into the professing Church of God. Mark her methods for grasping the mammon of unrighteousness: her fairs, her entertainments, her abominations that mark her source as they mark her end, for "strong is the Lord God that judgeth her." As in a hideous dream the same personage is at one moment "the Church," and the next it is "the world," and in her meshes may be seen many true saints!

Look closer; leave the mere professing bodies, with their well crystallized denominations and systems, and look again at a feeble little remnant who, drawn by the attractions of the One lovely Person of their Lord, had come out of all these divisions, and were united together in the bonds of a common *divine life in love as brethren. Simple in faith, lowly in mind,* with no claims to being anything at all distinct from other saints, God's evident blessing rested on them. Look now, and if the sight of contention and strife, with the loftiest pretensions, are not sufficient to call us to Bochim, then indeed are our "ears waxed heavy and our hearts gross."

*But, mark it well, cowardice or discouragement have no* tent-space at Bochim. Here courage revives, for the Lord on whom we wait never gives "the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind." Our enemies are many, strong, and subtle. The Church of God is like a defeated army, scattered and demoralized, with a foe that on all sides is sounding *the trumpet of victory*. But fear not! Fear not! "God is for us" to the end, and not one blood-sheltered lamb shall be lost. Lift up the voice in song, and the very singing shall cheer the feeble saints. "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." What is the result? "The humble shall hear thereof *and be*

*glad.*" Fear not! Bochim does not mean cowardice or fear, but self-judgment and confession, which is the root of courage and strength.

My dear reader, I want to speak with you as directly as you often want to speak to the lost about their souls. Neglect not in these days Bochim. Seek to find your way there, for there you will meet no veiled "angel of the Lord," but, in all His tender love and infinite beauty, thee Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

## Chapter 2:6 to 3:4

# FAILURE

Now as we seek to walk with our Lord through scenes of sorrow, and of bright but short-lived flashes of joy, may we never altogether lose sight of Bochim. It is a sweet spot, and the air is well adapted to clear vision; nor is the true dweller here very far, after all, from that still more blessed camping ground, Gilgal. As we may say, the shortest path to Gilgal, in a day of declension, is by the way of Bochim.

From verse 6 of chapter 2 to verse 4 of chapter 3 inclusive gives us a kind of "table of contents" of the whole book; and this division may again be subdivided into four parts thus:

1. Chapter 2:6-10. Israel's obedience.
2. Chapter 2:11-15. Israel's strange gods.
3. Chapter 2:16-18. Israel's revivals and declensions.
4. Chapter 2:19 to 3:4. Israel's testings.

Here is the circle in the ways of the people of God which may raise deeper groans of "vanity" than ever Ecclesiastes uttered. *He* could trace the constant unvarying course of winds and waters. "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full. Unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. All things are full of labor;" but in our book we trace the constant trend to degeneracy ever in poor *man*; his course is as constant as the rivers, ever to a lower level, till, weary and heavy laden, full of labor, he comes to One who sends some gracious attraction from

above, that draws him once more upward to the blessed God. But, alas, in this book in which we get more the ways of the first man under trial, it is only to fall again, lower than before *when the power of this fresh* movement passes away.

Thus our first paragraph: All goes well as long as Joshua and the elders contemporary with him lived. There was at least an outward correctness: "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua." Then comes "another generation after them which knew *not the Lord nor yet the works that He had done for* Israel." "Flesh" — that which knows not the Lord nor thinks of His gracious precious work — begins once more to claim a place, and degeneracy is marked and rapid.

Does it not add a kind of extra solemnity to our lot if we are living after a "first generation" has passed away? Does it not give stronger grounds for heart searching; for strong crying to God; for increased watchfulness; for clustering closer together in mutual love and exhortation? Surely it does; and in every sense of the word this is exactly the case with you and me, my dear reader. For let us see how history has repeated itself. Even in the days of the apostles, seeds are in the professing body, corresponding to the seeds ever cropping up *in Israel in these early days. Look at 2 Timothy 1:15:* "All they in Asia are turned away from me." And again, 1 John 2:18: "Even now are there many antichrists." The mystery of iniquity was even then already working (2 Th. 2). And all too easily is the same condition traced after every revival. See how quickly it resulted after that most gracious revival in the day of Luther. The "next generation" saw formalism taking the place of power, until even Luther's country becomes a kind of hotbed for the promulgation of infidelity.

Were the results different after the blessing in the day of

Whitefield, Wesley, Venn, and Beveridge? Nay, "another generation" followed to no equal power, but marked a long step downward toward what we see today in Methodism, whose ministers can lightly dishonor the same Scriptures their fathers reverenced as divine.

And has there not been another gracious revival closer to us in time than any of these — a recovery of many a long-lost and precious truth: such as the simplicity of all believers gathering in love as brethren to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; of the essential oneness of all saints as members of the One Body; of the second coming of our Lord as an ever-present hope? But we live in the time of the "next generation" — what need to speak more? One single glance about us will force the confession that the flesh has again come in, and we are not better than our fathers.

Thus our second paragraph opens with the first of a series of seven recurrences of the refrain, "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." "They forsook the Lord God of their fathers which brought them out of the land of Egypt." And what do they get in His place? Baal and Ashtaroth. Letting go of Him who would draw upward to Himself, they take hold of those who draw ever downward, till they are floundering in a bog of bestiality, where there is little to mark man from beast, except that man goes *lower*!

All man's real progress depends upon the link with what is above him — God. Break this, and everything goes wrong at once: political anarchy, moral depravity, social disorder, and confusion everywhere.

Who, then, are these Baalim and Ashtaroth for whom foolish men forsake the Lord? "Baal" means simply "lord," and is constantly translated "owner." The word has in it the idea of "power," for Baal is everywhere the male deity as

Ashtaroth is the female. Baal has been connected with the "sun" as Ashtaroth with the "moon," subsequently going somewhat lower to "Jupiter" and "Venus." Leaving the one true God, man makes his own gods, and he worships what speaks to him of "power" on the one hand and "fruitfulness" on the other. But these, being of his own invention, must correspond with himself; he can only invent according to his own capacity; that means they must be evil. But "power" in a bad sense, what is it but "*violence?*" well personified in the Jupiter of the Greeks; and "fruitfulness" of evil, what is it but "*corruption?*" equally well, if shamefully personified in Venus. Mark, then, that in giving up God, who is "*love*" and "*light*," they replace Him with the exact opposites, "violence" and "corruption" — Baalim and Ashtaroth — a poor exchange truly.

But in our third paragraph the Lord raises up "*judges*." Nor are these merely men who judge between man and man, for they form a renewed link with the Lord Himself. Surely, then, it is no uninteresting question as to what, or who, today answer to these judges. In the first place we must be careful not to seek their antitypes in individuals. This will lead to confusion and perhaps worse, for at one moment an individual may fairly answer to the judge of old, but even in the next moment there may be no resemblance whatever. Why? Because in the first case he was being led by certain truths or principles which in the next he has forsaken. Therefore we must rather seek the antitypes of those judges in the *principles* themselves that they represent.

We may have occasion as we go on to note the importance of this rule of interpretation. It is, I admit, quite different from that usually adopted. In times of conflict and division among the Lord's people, the Old Testament has ever been a kind of armory, whence the contending parties draw weapons

for their unnatural conflict. Our opponents are always aptly figured by the *evil* characters there portrayed; whilst modesty has but a negative power to prevent us from claiming to be ourselves the present representatives of the *good*. Surely this is both foolish and dangerous. These persons are, not figures or pictures of persons now; but of principles that may govern or affect, favorably or adversely, those on whom the ends of *the ages have come.*

Their "raising up" leads to a recovery from backsliding, a *return to God — victory, peace and liberty — in a word, to* what we may term a "revival." And still it is as true now as then, that all revival is dependent on "*judgment*." That is the first thing, whether in the case of an individual or in a wider sphere. Self-judgment: a true estimate of the true condition of things; a putting right what is wrong and giving the Lord His place once more.

See how the apostle in writing to later Hebrews, and having the time of our book in his mind, speaking as he does of a Gideon, a Barak, a Samson, says of them, "Who through *faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained* promises." Mark the divine order. God speaks, reveals Himself; faith hears and acts; the world is overcome, i.e., its "kingdom subdued." Next it establishes God in His true place of supremacy and man in his of dependency, i.e., "works righteousness," and thus brings to accomplishment all that God has promised when things are thus in this divine order — "obtains promises."

For so is it ever, as soon as the spirit of self-judgment rules, i.e., in the language of our book, as soon as there is a judge *raised up, then the Lord is with that lowly spirit, and* deliverance comes at once, whether to the individual, the local gathering, or the still wider sphere.

These captivities, and the ways of deliverance, ever differing from one another, we trace throughout the book. They are not of the same character in detail; but, as time goes on, there has to be an increasing guard against the claims and pretensions of the "first man;" till, in Samson, the last of the judges, we get a very imperfect deliverance of a very imperfect Nazarite. And we shall find, if I mistake not, that we are living just in these last days.

Our fourth section (ch. 2:19 to 3:4) in beautiful harmony with its numerical position, speaks of Israel's *testings*. Nations are left in their midst for this purpose; but this, in itself, is evidence of their unfaithfulness. On God's part nothing is lacking to destroying them altogether; but the people constantly lapsing, the Lord says, "I also will not drive out henceforth any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died." Their state will not permit the absence of the nations altogether. And is not this the case with every individual saint? God cannot trust us without the "nations," or what answers to these; they are "thorns in our side." Some there be who say that, as to themselves, no more are the "nations" in them; they have no flesh; but surely the Scriptures speak a different story, when even our own apostle, after such wondrous revelations as were unutterable, has a "*thorn in the flesh*," a messenger of Satan to buffet him. The flesh was still in Paul after the most exalted of revelations.

But whilst thus left, it does not follow that they are to be *served*, quite the contrary. They are to be made to "pay tribute"; to further, not oppose, the wise counsels of His tender love. They are to "humble, to prove." Is not that exactly why He leaves us in, and leads us through, this "great and terrible wilderness," that He may humble us and prove us, to know what is in our heart (Dt. 8:2)? But does He not

know? Indeed he does. But it is *we* who have to learn, *we* who have to find the source of power in battle, and the secret of victory. Yea, and through many a defeat, many a humiliation, many a sorrow. But all works for *good*. The nations are not left in Israel to enslave Israel; the flesh is not left in us that we should serve its lusts, nay, but to learn by *war*, the love of His heart, the strength of His arm, and that He can make our enemies work His purposes of grace. What brought from God's heart those rivers of refreshing waters of life that we get in the Epistles? The foolishness and errors of His people. The saints in Corinth were in much moral and doctrinal evil; yet is not even this state made the occasion of teaching us unfathomable wonders and glories? Look even at Peter's awful sin. What has shown our Lord's grace in dealing with backsliding more than that? Hearken, too, to Peter's foolish — as we now see them — objections to the Lord's washing his feet in John 13; do not His answers reveal to us such depths of love that we almost feel thankful to Peter himself for being the occasion of their display. Ah no, we will not thank "the eater" because meat comes from him, nor "the strong" because sweetness comes from him, but we may well praise Him who alone does all these wonders, in turning all to the display of His own perfections of love and light.

The nations then represent various forms of evil, native to the old Adam-nature; their false gods would be what that nature loves and adores. "Serving these gods" means, for a Christian, allegiance to falsehood and evil principles, resulting in slavery and misery; and, as long as we are here, there is but one alternative to slavery, and that is victory. "Blessed be the Lord, my strength, who teacheth my hands to war, my fingers to fight."

## Chapter 3:5-11

# THE FIRST CAPTIVITY AND DELIVERANCE

## OTHNIEL

The first of everything in Scripture is peculiarly interesting and significant, and ever calls for the most careful consideration. Generally speaking it gives a kind of *pattern* of all that follows. It is thus that the apostle Paul referred to the mercy that he obtained. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (or the *first*). Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me, *the* first, Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. *1:15, 16*). That is, that the Lord Jesus had selected one who had gone to the furthest lengths possible in high-handed rebellion — and mark, this was no outcast of society, but one *of the most religious men that ever lived, if not absolutely so* — so that none afterwards might doubt His power or grace.

So here in this first captivity we get the root principle of all evidenced, and at this we must look. The instrument used for the chastening of His people is not selected arbitrarily or without reason. That instrument corresponds to the evil that calls for its use. In a certain sense Israel herself forms her own punishment, exactly on the principle of reaping what one

sows. This seems one of the underlying principles of all retribution, that absolutely closes the mouth of the punished. Can I blame anyone if I reap the very crop that I sowed? Mark how delicately this principle maintains the balances of justice. Have I sowed with a free hand? Every single seed brings forth its resultant fruit in the time of harvest, and that harvest depends exactly, in character and quantity, on the seed sown. It is a most solemn word, not confined at all to unbelievers, but directly addressed to Christians, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Thus in the case before us there has been steady declension. In the first chapter the Canaanites and other nations are said to "dwell amongst" the children of Israel; but mark the result of ceasing to fight; now "the children of Israel" dwell amongst *them*; quite a difference. *They* (Israel) are now the ones who are merely permitted on sufferance; the ancient inhabitants of the land are again the prominent ones. The next step then is easy, i.e., alliances: "They took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons and served their gods." It is the universal sequence — horror of sin weakens — the permission of it gradually results in *alliances* with it, and the heart has evidently gone from its own portion. So ever does the downward path begin, both in the church and in the individual. "I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love." No longer is the Lord Jesus Christ the one supreme attractive object of the affections; others share at least those affections, and gradually displace them, till, like Israel, we "*forget*," and then the fall is rapid indeed.

"Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Chushan-Rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia (or Aram Naharaim, margin), and the children of Israel served Chushan-Rishathaim eight years."

Now who or what is this oppressor whose strange name we are here told? We have no mention of him elsewhere in Sacred Scriptures, and if therefore we are to get any teaching, it must be from the significance of the name given. Its meaning is not uncertain; but clearly is "the darkness of double wickedness." The Lord's people then are given over once more to bondage, to "darkness of double wickedness." Not mere *natural* darkness is this we may be sure; but light rejected, turned away from, and that is the worst form of darkness. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness"; if the light thou hast had has not really enlightened thee, if thou hast had the light shining in thee, but hast loved the darkness, then is thy case *doubly* evil. We read of many who in the very early days seem to have been in danger of this Chushan-Rishathaim. Were not the Galatians warned against him, since after they had known God, or rather were known of God, they *turned again* "to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto they desired to be in bondange." So the Hebrews are warned, "for it is impossible for those who were once *enlightened* and have tasted of the heavenly gift . . . if they shall fall away to renew them again to repentance;" and more clearly than all do we see the "double wickedness" in 2 Timothy 3. In Romans 1:29-31, we get a long list of awful abominations into which the heathen world had fallen; it is the "first" wickedness. In Timothy we have almost a repetition of the same list as characterizing the last days of Christendom, for it is connected with "a *form* of godliness." Surely this is the full development of "the darkness of double wickedness," the seeds of which were sown at the very beginning of the present age.

This Chushan-Rishathaim is king of "*Aram Naharaim*" — words as easily transferred into English as any others in the text. Aram is "the exalted land;" Naharaim, "of the two rivers." The land that is lifted up, having *two* rivers for its

dependence. Mark again the same plural as in the name of the king himself. There was a land whose boast was in its single river — Egypt. She was quite independent of heaven; no rain fell upon her, but her river sent its fertilizing waters over her desert sands and covered them with a rich alluvial soil. She knew not whence that river came, but at least she knew that she was independent of the rains of heaven, and this was her boast: "My river is my own, and I have made it" (Ezek. 29:3). A very apt figure of the world in its alienation from God — *receiving blessings, but as blindly as the very beasts,* without any true recognition whence they come, except quite assured that they are *not* from God. It is true that of late years men have discovered "the source of the Nile," exactly as they have by their scientific research found a simple natural cause for everything, without any real need of a God at all. The river merely comes from a chain of lakes in the far South; there is the *source* of the Nile. But some troublesome questioner may perhaps ask our scientist, "Whence do these lakes get the water?" Nor will it avail for him to answer, "They are fed by thousands of rills and springs," for push back the question once more, "Are these rills and springs self-supplying, or whence are they supplied?" And now like that question asked the scribes as to John's baptism, the answer must be either "of heaven" or "of earth," and he dare not say of heaven for we should answer, "Why then do ye not believe?" nor of earth for all men would count him a fool indeed. No; little as this world knows it, it is still absolutely dependent on God for all those blessings that come to it so naturally as men speak, but its present boast is in independence.

It is indeed very striking that thus the very topography of our earth has, at least in certain parts, a divine significance. Mountains and plains, rivers and seas are but pictures of

eternal verities; and to an opened ear, with the light of the lessons we have had from the land of one river, we may gather much from the land of two rivers.

It lay quite in the opposite direction from Egypt. This was S. W., *that* was N. E. This may point for us a moral, but too often utterly overlooked. We are never really safe from error when we have our eyes *on* error. *Be occupied with error and you will fall into error.* Not the same, it is true, but its opposite. For evil is as dual as good. God is not Love only; but Light; and evil has equally a double character in violence and corruption. We ever sail as it were between Scylla and Charybdis, between the rock on the one hand, and the whirlpool on the other. If the helmsman keep his eyes on Scylla, he will beyond question fall into Charybdis, and vice versa. But let him keep his eyes on Christ, the alone Compass or guiding Star between the two, and he is safe.

The "Lofty Land of the two rivers" now provides the oppressor. It may speak not merely of independence of God in the sphere of natural blessings only; but as forsaking Him in spiritual things too. The Church leaves as we also know her first love: her portion. Jesus the Lord is no longer *all* to her. She can get along without Him, since she has other and earthly resources — this leads to captivity, as it did in the case of Israel; and is this not worse than at first? The greater the light enjoyed, the greater the condemnation in leaving it.

The land of the *two* rivers is thus then *doubly* provided for. Well may it be "Aram," "lifted up." It is complete independence of God, not only as to natural blessings, but even as to spiritual and in every way; and Israel, forgetting God, is given up to captivity, to the darkness of a second lawlessness that ever reigns over that land, that is lifted up in its independence of God.

The deliverance is very simple: "And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel." That "cry" is all that is necessary. See how this is repeatedly emphasized in Psalm 107: "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them out of their distress." A sense and confession of misery must always precede deliverance from it. So was it with Israel in Egypt, "their cry came up unto God," so shall it be with that same Israel shortly again, "when there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem," "every family apart" (Zech. 12).

It is really a cause for encouragement when we too, dear reader, individually feel the effect of our wanderings from our God. There is *hope* when we begin to enter the valley of Achor (trouble). That valley is ever a door of hope (Hos. 2:15).

A deliverer, *exactly suited to the condition of things*, since he in every way speaks of the dependence of faith, is divinely found in Othniel, "the lion of God." We have heard of him before. He is closely related to the "*wholehearted*" Caleb, and like him knows the secret of Isaiah 40:30, 31: "Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." Time has no effect on the resources of faith, nor saps the strength that lies in weakness depending on God. He is the son of Kenaz, "*the recipient of strength*;" that is, the spirit of *dependence* gives birth to the deliverer. And mark that deliverer is of Judah. He is as one may say, "The lion of the tribe of Judah," a name significant enough, and at once our thoughts pass over the ages to that blessed scene, still in the future, where One is found "worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof." Is it not intensely interesting that this

is exactly what Othniel has already done in figure? It was he who captured Kirjeth-Sepher, "the city of the *book*," and at once it becomes "Debir," the living "oracle." "A written word merely, is exchanged for a living voice, the voice of Him who when the heart is right with Him, delights to draw near and speak to the heart of the worshipper."* Is not this "opening the book and loosing its seals?" Yea, until that Word is heard indeed in the heart, the book remains ever a sealed book. But Othniel, the lion of God, so closely identified (as faith ever is with its object) with "the lion of the tribe of Judah," ever opens the book. Here is a beautiful figure: In the near future, for Israel, and her place upon the earth, as now for every pilgrim of faith on his way homeward. Kenaz, the spirit of dependence, is the very reverse of Chushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram Naharaim, and from that spirit of dependence, of conscious weakness, helplessness, and need, springs Othniel, the spirit of courage and faith. The voice of God is heard once more, and Chushan-Rishathaim is delivered unto His hand, whilst in holy liberty we sing, "Return unto thy rest, oh my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Israel thus rests in liberty forty years.

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*Numerical Bible.

# THE SECOND CAPTIVITY

## Ehud

"And the land had rest forty years." Blessed "*rest*," only truly appreciated after such conflict and toil; but it is not yet the eternal rest of God, for it is soon broken. Othniel dies, and at once, as if Israel's piety were buried in his tomb, she does "*evil in the sight of the Lord.*" So was it in that faroff day of old, and so has it often been in subsequent history. Nor, I will venture to say, when *our* short life's story is shown out, dear reader, will there be lacking some such sorrowful incident in it as the "doing evil" immediately following the decease of a "judge."

Let but the spirit of judgment, of divine holy discrimination between what is "of the Father" and what "of the world," with unmitigated reprobation of the latter, die out; and at once evil shows itself again, our "rest" is broken, and there is ever an oppressor not far off.

Eglon, king of Moab, is this time the instrument of chastening the Lord uses; an instrument doubtless exactly adapted to the "evil" that now shows itself; so that we may get a clear idea of the disease from the medicine used to counteract it. "Eglon" means "circular," and this root-meaning applies not only to the form, but to the motion consequent on it. For instance, "agalah," "chariot," "cart," which, as moving on its circular revolving wheels, combines both form and motion (Numerical Bible).

Thus "Eglon" figures clearly the law of unceasing, wearying, circling change, without anything ever new. Everything, as Ecclesiastes groans, sun, wind, water, generations, ever *revolving*, ever "*circling*," whence they came, but nothing really *new*. It is the law of wearying restlessness that *governs* the world away from God. No wonder that when the Lord's people get away from God into that world, they, too, come under the power of Eglon.

He is king of Moab. What then is figured by Moab? From what we have seen of Eglon, we should naturally say at once that Moab is simply the *world* away from God. Yes, but we may perhaps get a little closer than this — it is the world truly, but in some particular aspect of it. Look at the name "Moab," "seed of a father;" the shame of his birth is ever told out plainly in his name. He is the incestuous son of Abraham's nephew, poor Lot, the world-loving "righteous man."

Moab's country, too, touched Israel's land; lying to the southeast of Canaan, bordering the Amorites on the south, from whose land it was separated by the River Arnon. This was not given to Israel for a possession, but was secured divinely to Moab.

The Moabites are thus near to Israel by both *birth* and by *locality*. They are not, as the Philistines, *in* the land. It is the world, bordering on the domain of faith. Not the world-bordering Church, but the church-bordering *world*. There is a long boundary line, on one side of which is the Church, on the other the world — a strong, boundary line, for it is the river of death, Jordan. But let Israel lose possession of the fords of Jordan, the cross, whose power alone spans death; let her lose her place as dead and crucified with Christ, and she becomes captive to the world, i.e., mere profession at once.

Fair, too, are the daughters of Moab, and not alone in that far-off day, when, in Moab's plains, the tents of Israel were spread out "as gardens by the river side," have they proved a serious stumbling block to the heavenly pilgrims. Every fair attractive worldly delight that makes us forget our true home is a "daughter of Moab."

Well, then, Moab prefigures the world *near* the Church; mere *worldly* profession; and for a saint to come under the power of Moab is to have his usefulness, power, and joy replaced with wretchedness, impotence, and distress. Vitality and power die out with departure from God. The *form* becomes dominant. It is a natural consequence, and yet a punishment from the Lord. "Having a form of godliness but denying the power," has in it an element distinctly Moabitish; many a saint is today captive to Moab, and quite content to have it so.

As a further help to discover the Moabite today we may note that he bears this mark to distinguish him from the Philistine. This latter is one who has come *up* from Egypt, from the world, within the sphere of faith, but with no right there, whilst the Moabite *goes down*, falls from what is living and true into the world. This is the direction the children of the Lord's people too often take, dropping away from all vital piety, and taking this world as their portion. We might say that we should find the Philistine principle in all forms of ecclesiasticism headed up in Roman Catholicism, whilst the Moabite is in the current worldly dead Protestantism.

Who is the divinely selected deliverer from Moab?

He is "Ehud, the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded," and, of course, he prefigures some principle or spirit that must *rule* the Lord's people for their deliverance from mere profession. "Gera is the father of Ehud." "Gera"

means "meditation," and it is surely this that so often naturally precedes deliverance, and from which springs, in contrast with the empty formalism of worldliness, a joyful realization of our own happy portion in Christ. For "Ehud" is akin to Judah — Je-hud-ah, the "*hud*" having the same significance of "*praise*" in both cases.

We may then interpret the names thus: "Meditation" gives birth to "praise," i.e., the energy of faith, and then the world-ruler "Eglon" is doomed.

But let us look a little closer at the father of this active, energetic Ehud. He is much overlooked just now. The spirit of the age has little use for Gera; he is relegated to obscurity as a dreamer and unpractical, but Scripture gives him a very honorable place. The First Psalm thus speaks of him: "His delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night." Nor does the New Testament at all belittle Gera: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on* these things."

Do not, my reader, seek to be constantly active, nor even constantly taking in fresh food from God's Word, apart from Gera. Lie down in those pleasant pastures, as do the cattle in the fields, and ruminate, or chew the cud of what you have already cropped. It is no waste of time, nor indeed a mere matter of choice, but an absolute necessity. Never will you exhaust, or press out between the teeth of your faith, *all* the sweetness and nourishment there is in old truths cropped long ago. Ruminate, meditate. It will deepen your experience; for then will Gera, as we may say, take you by the hand and lead you into an ever deepening enjoyment of your own portion; and, in due time, Ehud shall be born and shall do valiantly;

but "Ehud" must spring from "Gera," "activity" from "meditation."

It is true that Ehud is left-handed. Yes, in this deliverance there begins to be evidenced the divine care to keep Israel from vaunting themselves. Ever more and more must the weakness of the instrument used be manifested, for Israel is ever more and more in danger of thus vaunting, because of decreasing realization of the truth, and this we shall note as we go on.

Ehud is sent by his people on one kind of an errand; the Lord sends him on quite another. They send to Eglon the tribute expressive of their bondage, a humiliating service for Ehud; but this joyful child of "meditation" serves another Master and bears another message. No tribute, but a two-edged dagger that shall effectually deliver captive Israel from all tribute.

How simple and easy it is to interpret our narrative here! Who cannot see in this two-edged sword that "Word of God that is living, and powerful, and sharper than any *two-edged sword,* piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." That which grasps it may be the weak left hand, but let but faith (ever figured by the *hand*) grasp it all, and it will do its work effectually enough.

But, mark, we are told its length: it is a cubit long. Of what interest is it to you or me to know the length of Ehud's sword? The single cubit must speak of something — what? Listen to the Lord Jesus: "Which of you by taking thought can add *one cubic* to his stature? If ye then be not able to do that which is least." Does this not give us an idea of *insignificance*. Does it not, then, in this connection tell us that the *simplest truths* of God's Word truly grasped by faith are

quite sufficient to pierce through all the apparent prosperity of this world, i.e., the belly of fat Eglon. One need not be able to grasp the deep things of God. One may be in large measure ignorant of prophetic truth, of dispensational truth, as we speak. All of these are most precious and helpful in the path of holy separation, but they are beyond the "one cubic." Shall we look at a dagger of "one cubit"? Here it is, "*Jesus is the Son of God.*" Grasp that; by a true faith, even though perhaps left-handed and weak enough, and what follows? The world is overcome. "For who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth "*Jesus is the Son of God*" (1 Jn. 5:5).

Take then thy stand, my soul, for awhile by the quarries in Gilgal; by that cross on Calvary where hung "Jesus, the Son of God." Why hung He there? For thee. "He loved me and gave Himself for me." Does not the sight deliver the affections from captivity to the world that put Him there? Is not this a sword that delivers them?

Aye, but that cross is quite empty now, and where shall I find Him who so loved me as to suffer there: the eternal divine Lover of my soul? Lift up the eye to the highest height, even to the very throne of the majesty on High, and see "Jesus, the Son of God" ever there. Has He not won thy heart? Wilt thou linger in a world that still hates and despises Him? Wilt thou not run thy race to Him as little burdened as possible? Oh where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be.

Our sword is but a cubic long, but it is amply sufficient when "girded on the right thigh," that is, convenient for use at any moment,* and this sufficiency is also implied in the length of one cubic.

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*It is interesting and very confirmatory of this to note that one, who has made a study of the significance of numerals, writes of the numeral "*One*"; it implies "*Sufficiency*, power; that which stands alone must have power to

Next, mark, "Eglon was a very *fat* man." Fat is the emblem of prosperity all through Scripture. Here is it fair worldly prosperity, etc. This thought is further emphasized, in the narrative, by his possession of the City of Palm Trees. For the palm tree is equally a symbol of prosperity; sometimes used in a good sense, "the righteous shall flourish like the palm tree," but here, of course, it is simply worldly prosperity that is figured. The child of God, or the people of God, have come under the power of worldly prosperity — they have got *up* in the world. Their income is much larger than it was. They are living in greater style, and in the eye of their friends they are "prospering" greatly. Let the light of the sanctuary fall on much of this prosperity, and what a striking change! A shrivelled soul; a joyless heart; a dumb spirit, and the chains of the captive are seen. Sad enough is this, but still more sad when, like the poor worldling himself, we hug our chains, love our captivity, and utter no "cry."

Note one point more. Ehud himself "turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal," and, to get the significance of this, we must correct one word. "*Quarries*" should be "*boundaries*;" they are the boundary stones dividing between different estates or countries. These boundaries are by Gilgal — oh, solemn place for worldly prosperity to meet faith armed with the Word of God. For "Gilgal" is the place where, by *the sharp knives of circumcision*, the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away. It is the boundary between faith and unbelief; between the Church and the world. It is "the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). How can Eglon live here?

Face to face in this solemn place, in solemn silence and alone they stand; the fat, prosperous World; and poor, left-

stand alone." So that we may feel assured in seeing "sufficiency" in the one cubit that our God has given us the light *He would have us get from this one-*cubit dagger — to His Name the praise.

handed Faith. The scene is quickly over. Into the very belly of Eglon sinks the sharp sword of Ehud; the very belly, the self-center of all that is of the world and not of the Father; of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life;" that which flesh serves (Phil. 3) and which is never satisfied, is pierced through and through. With what result? *Its true nature is fully exposed.* Let us not be so falsely delicate as not to profit by this strong-worded truth. The prosperity of the world, fat and flourishing as it appears externally, is seen under the stroke of God's word — in the light of Jesus, whom it crucified, being the Son of the living God — as nothing but "*dirt.*" Yea, so says another Benjamite, who well knew how to wield that sword: "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but dung* that I may win Christ and be found in Him." How much does this leave of fat Eglon alive?

V. 27. Now the trumpet is blown. Faith, conqueror over the world, will have all the Lord's dear people share in the victory, and whenever that trumpet's joyful note is heard, the slave leaps up a free man. Oh, that we, dear reader — if this poor, vain, fleeting world, fat and flourishing though it may appear, has in any measure brought us into bondage — may hear that joyful trumpet-blast, and follow the leading of faith to complete victory. Secure the "fords of Jordan" — the only place where Jordan can be crossed. Oh, where is that? but also at that *cross,* where, in Christ, we pass through death and judgment dry-shod and untouched. Secure this vitally strategic point; it belongs to us, as believers in Jesus, and all the remnant of worldliness, even ten thousand fat and lusty Moabites, shall fall — not a man shall escape!

I have sought to apply, as I followed the narrative; but give me, for one moment, your hand in spirit, my dear reader, and

let me press upon you, as one who has not been without wounds himself in this warfare, the solemn, joyful truths of this second captivity and the deliverance therefrom. Stealthily Moab steals into our portion, and without any battle (note this), before we are aware, he is our master, and we are giving him tribute; tribute of precious opportunities never to be regained; tribute of time spent in building "wood, hay and stubble" for the fire of a fast-coming day; tribute of many a heartache, of many a care, of many an anxiety; tribute of many a fall into "temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." Oh, let us "cry," and even as we cry we shall surely "meditate" on that holy Word of God, and this "meditation" will give birth to the energy of faith: "Ehud;" which shall expose fully, with one home-stroke, the inherent filthiness and worthlessness of this poor world. "Cry" and "meditate" — what is this but an active carrying out of the commendation of the apostle to "God" and the "word of His grace." To the One we "cry," on the other we "meditate," and a joyfully revived energy slays worldliness, and lo, with a trumpet-blast of joy, we once more possess our own and are free. Oh, rest not, my reader, short of that home-thrust with thy two-edged sword into the very belly of Eglon; till, with loathing, you too turn from that which had captivated you and which you now see to be but "*dirt.*"

## Chapter 3 — *Continued*

# SHAMGAR

Before considering the third captivity, we must not overlook one single verse telling of an exploit of faith that is recorded for our profit. There is no word of any fresh evildoing on the part of Israel, nor of consequent bondage; but merely "after him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an oxgoad; and he also delivered Israel" (ch. 3:31).

How often, dear readers, have we read this verse, and how much benefit have we derived from it? Do you think there is nothing in it but a bare historical fact? Interesting, indeed, as all history is interesting; but with little more direct bearing on ourselves than a myriad other incidents that may or may not be mythical, such as

> "How well Horatius kept the bridge
> In the brave days of old."

Surely God, our God, has intended something more than this for His people. May He teach us what it is to the glory of His grace in Christ Jesus, and I pray you to say Amen, and join me in diligent search.

We have so little to help us in the interpretation that we cannot afford to overlook or slight a single item, but must ponder each.

First — We are told the time: "After him."

Second — The name of the deliverer: Shamgar.

Third — The name of his father: Anath.

Fourth — The foe: Philistines.

Fifth — The number slain: Six hundred.

Sixth — The weapon used: An oxgoad.

Seventh — The result: Israel delivered.

And this is the whole verse; but it has clearly marked on it that divinely significant number of perfection: Seven.

First, "After him:" We may gather from the peculiar way this incident is here introduced, with no fresh lapse on Israel's part, that it forms a kind of moral complement to the deliverance under Ehud, somewhat in the same way as we shall see again in chapter 10:1, 3, and chapter 12:11, 13, except that here it may be fairly questioned whether this exploit occurs *subsequently* to the eighty years' rest under Ehud, or was a deliverance from the western enemy, also leading up to that same long period of repose.

The words "after him" undoubtedly denote that Shamgar's victory *followed* that of Ehud, but they do not necessitate the death of the latter. Verse 1 of chapter 4, "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, *when Ehud was dead*," would militate against this, and throw us back on the explanation that the example set by Ehud was followed by Shamgar: that Shamgar walked "after him," *in the same path of faith*, and thus his victory is closely connected morally with that of Ehud, and carries that gracious deliverance to completion. He is a companion-deliverer; leading out of the world and its bondage.

Second: There are various meanings given to the name Shamgar, but the most simple and direct seems to be that it is

*Ger Shom*, with the syllables reversed, and slightly different vowel points, which do not alter the meaning. And this meaning is thus given us with divine certainty as "Here a stranger" (Ex. 2:22). Thus he perfectly and beautifully would figure to us that spirit of strangership which is the basis of a true pilgrim walk. We must be *strangers, to be* pilgrims. As long as we are at home on the earth, we cannot possibly be pilgrims through it. We must be "strangers here"; there must be nothing in the present scene to hold back the longing heart from its own home and rest. Shamgar is as much out of touch with this old-creation scene as a sheep would be in a wild forest filled with wolves, and who hears the familiar and loved voice of the shepherd in the distant fold — he longs for home. Happy Christian whose name is Shamgar! Happy he who is governed by the spirit of strangership on earth!

"His steps, he knows, are on the plains of danger,
For sin is near;
But, looking up, he passes on, a 'stranger,' (or Shamgar)
In haste and fear."

Such is Shamgar. Nor is his parentage without significance. He is the son of Anath, a word meaning "answer," and this leads us back, I judge, to the "cry" that had, before Eglon, during that sad eighteen years' captivity, been conspicuous only by its absence. Now, in happy contrast, the spirit of dependent watchful prayer has followed the deliverance; such prayer as is never unanswered, never *without* "Anath"; and God's answer to prayer produces Shamgar: the energy of faith in the spirit of strangership and pilgrimage. Shamgar is the son of Anath. To your closet, my beloved reader, if you would be in any way a Shamgar. A neglected Throne of Grace leads to a settling here that brings chastening.

The enemy is the *Philistine*. He will come before us more prominently later, so that we will not dwell upon him here.

Suffice it to note that whilst he bears a marked and close resemblance to Moab, there is yet a wide distinction. The Philistine is *always in* the land. He always claims a home in the domain of faith, although he is no true pilgrim, but a mere "wanderer," as his name means. He has never, in his journey from his own place in Egypt, whence he comes, crossed Jordan, but has stolen in "some other way" (John 10). He knows nothing at all of death and resurrection with Christ, of having passed through judgment, and being "holy and without blame before God in love," "taken into favor in the Beloved." All this is a foreign language to him, and he calls it "presumption." He is still alive in the flesh (Col. 2:20), and is, whilst religious enough, an enemy to the cross of Christ (Phil. 3). Would you know where the Philistine is to be found today? You will detect him in the spirit of ecclesiastical formalism wherever it is, but there is no clearer expression of Philistinism than that wonderful, earth-adapted, worldly, religious system called Roman-Catholicism, although it is not necessarily confined to this expression by any means, and perhaps may be a good deal nearer to *you*, dear reader, than you are aware.

Such is the Philistine, and Shamgar is his fitting conqueror. The energy of faith, that knows all that awaits it at the end of its race, makes great havoc with mere worldly formalism. As soon as any *Form* takes the place of the power of godliness which is the cross of Christ applied to the flesh, there is bondage at once to the Philistine, although you may be in the purest, simplest, most scripturally gathered church or assembly conceivable.

Six hundred Philistines are no match for one Shamgar armed with a simple oxgoad! The number suggests a formidable troop to sight, but "six" tells out its weakness; for a prominent significance of this number is "the weakness

of evil when opposed to God." This is most surely strongly stamped upon it here, when six hundred fall before one, armed with an oxgoad.

These numbers surely introduce us to much very precious and practical truth. Six is one short of seven which speaks clearly of "perfection," "everything very good," "rest." "Six" tells us of man's work days, yet do they never reach "seven." So see a full expression of *man*, in his Satan-filled ambition to attain to the place of God, in Nebuchadnezzar's image — it is sixty cubits high (not seventy) and six cubits broad (not seven), thus limited both ways and falling short of perfection and rest. So again, when evil is more fully, yea thoroughly, manifested in a day to come — the number of him who then heads up man's sin under the Devil's rule has a number given that fully expresses him just as a name would: "it *is the number of his name*" (Rev. 13:18). And again mark what it is: "666." The same thing as Nebuchadnezzar's image only with another 6 added, telling the same story of man's fruitless effort to attain the divine place — for it is "*the number of a man*" — another and final attempt to be as God.

What does the oxgoad teach? It is not a very likely weapon for such a work, but quite sufficient when in the proper hand. Let faith grasp it, and an oxgoad is as formidable as the sword.

The oxgoad in itself would be the fitting emblem of the Word of God. If, as Ecclesiastes tells us, "the words of the wise are as goads," that is: sharp, pointed, effective to stir up, and to send along the pilgrim way any who would linger here, then the words of divine perfect wisdom must have peculiarly that character. I see therefore in this "oxgoad" only another figure of the divine Word.

Seventh: Israel is delivered; bondage is gone; she is free.

*Joy and song once more take the place of depression and* silence. It figures not material prosperity, no lucky stroke of business, no "ship come in," probably quite the reverse, but things unseen are *real* now, the love of Christ is wine, the sufficiency of Christ is bread; and the Father's house is home.

Such is the glorious exploit of Shamgar, completing the victory of Ehud, and perhaps it may tend to confirm our interpretation to show the parallel between the two, thus:

| | |
|---|---|
| GERA — The spirt of quiet meditation begets | ANATH — Prayer answered begets |
| EHUD — The energy of faith: the spirit of joyful praise, who with | SHAMGAR — The energy of faith leading to pilgrimage, who with |
| A SHARP SWORD OF ONE CUBIT, the Word of God, slays | AN OXGOAD — The Word of God, slays |
| *THE MOABITE — Ease-loving* worldliness. | *THE PHILISTINE — Worldly* religious formalism. |

Here from the same armory are two different weapons. The *Bible has some resemblance to those old towers, that are to be* seen in Europe, where the weapons of past ages are stored, only here the arms are not superannuated, as those that hang in the towers of earth. Here we may look at those weapons that our fathers used with double interest, for they are the very ones for us now. There has been no improvement, no superseding of "sword" with rifle, nor "oxgoad" with explosives. It is indeed invigorating to see faith handle a short sword or an oxgoad, but it will not avail much to admire the *worthy, be he Ehud or Shamgar; we must ourselves grasp the* same weapon and learn also to use it equally effectively, for the same foe would hinder our path and bring us into captivity if he can. We must, of course, remember that now

the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, for our foe is not carnal; so since we have found a "sword of one cubit" in the words, "Jesus is the Son of God," shall we seek to find an oxgoad? Turn to Col. 3: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." That is surely a *pointed* call for us to press on, and not settle down here. Where is Christ? We have watched Him once, as at midday a strange cloudless darkness enwrapped the land, and for three hours there was a solemn silence, till it was broken only by His awful cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He, the holy One, was there, our sins on Him. He was there, made sin. He was there, a curse. He was there in my place, treated, dealt with as if it had been me — *I was there in Him!* But where is He now? Lift up the eye once more past earthly pomp and glory, past thrones of kings and dignities of earth, past angels, archangels, and highest powers in heaven; linger not in the first heaven, the outer court, nor in the second, the holy place; go *through* the heavens, for you are on His path (Heb. 4:14, R. V.), till you come to "the third heaven," the highest, holiest of all, and with veiled adoring eye behold the erstwhile Sufferer there seated "at the right hand of the throne of God." You have found Him at last; He is there; and oh, wonder of all wonders, we too are "in Him" there, as we were "in Him" on Calvary. Can you grasp it? There is an oxgoad indeed in this wondrous truth. Can your faith take hold of it?

Let but the hand of faith take hold of this, and we are armed at once with Shamgar's oxgoad, and the earth-grovelling Philistine must die. For if I have passed through the cold, dark waters of death and judgment in my Lord Jesus Christ, if my place: my own place, dearly purchased for me, is now in light and love; if my home: my own very HOME, where I am better *known* than anywhere in all the universe,

and better *loved* than anywhere in all the universe, is there where He is, then am I away from home in the world. I am Shamgar, "a stranger here," a pilgrim to my home.

Much-loved Christian reader, may our God and Father make His Word an "oxgoad" to us, and teach us not to "kick against these pricks"; that but guide us to our home. Remember when tempted to settle down here *in fleshly ease* and *self-pleasing comfort*, it is the *Moabite* who would lead us captive, the Herodian of the day of the Lord Jesus; use the sharp sword of God's Word on him, and speed homeward. And when tempted to settle down in *respectable worldly religion*, it is the *Philistine* who would lead us captive, the Pharisee of the day of the Lord Jesus; grasp the oxgoad and with it lay him low, and speed on to God, our only home, where He is.

## Chapter 4

# BARAK

We may now look at poor Israel in her further downward course "from Jerusalem to Jericho." Eighty quiet years of rest will follow the double victory of Ehud and Shamgar — a double "forty," as was the usual limit of peace up to this time; and this, in itself, tends to confirm our view that the two preceding deliverances were closely connected together. But the arrow will not fly forever without returning to earth; and we see its fall again here, in the words with which our chapter opens; those words that are becoming so sadly familiar to us, like the ever-recurring refrain of a mournful dirge, "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord."

This introduces the third captivity — the Lord sells them — as if he had lost all interest and ownership in them; but He is never the richer by such a sale, "Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price" (Ps. 44). It is a strong way of speaking of entire giving up to another. This time it is to "Jabin, king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor, the captain of whose host was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles."

This is the third captivity; and what light may we get from the significance of this number? It speaks of resurrection or revival: as the Lord Jesus revived and rose again on the third day. The number has of course other, and kindred, significations, such as "complete manifestation," etc.; but it

clearly bears in it the idea of revival. So, if this be the case, we may expect to find here old foes once more active; foes that Israel has triumphantly met years ago; foes supposed to be slain and utterly destroyed: here they will be again, in full *activity and energy. Who would ever have expected to have* heard of Hazor as a dominant city again after such a destruction as Joshua 11 records — "And Joshua at that time turned back and took Hazor," and smote the king thereof with the sword, utterly destroying them; there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire. One would say, "That is surely the end of Hazor forever." Not at all; here it *is again; and, strangely enough, the very same king is over it,* as far as his name goes, as in that day of Joshua's victory. Then it was Jabin, king of Hazor, who was at the head of this confederacy of northern kings, whom Joshua defeated at the waters of Merom. So now it is Jabin — of course another personage, and yet not another morally, or in what he figures, inasmuch as he is only a repetition of the first.

Now is not all this at least in perfect harmony with what we should expect from the significance of the number three? It is indeed. And full to the very brim with solemn, yet welcome *warning in it to you and me, my reader, for indeed we may* well be anxious to make it very personal for our profit, for there are few of us who have not been where Israel is now. Long ago you met, in the strength of Christ's precious grace, some dominant sin — a sin that had long lorded it over you with unquestioned tyranny, but then you learned of the grace in Christ Jesus, and, strong in that grace, the foe was at once *beneath your feet — you were a free man, and, you thought,* a free man forever! Never more shall that sin have dominion over you; never more shall you need to meet it in battle. Ah, wait. That depends yet upon you. If you maintain the place of watchful dependence: the sense of helplessness, with *confidence in the* same strong arm and tender heart by which

Jabin had been laid low, then may you pass through all your pilgrimage a victor over Jabin. But think not that he cannot revive — that he is literally annihilated. It is most seriously false teaching that tells us that the principle of sin is ever exterminated from the believer. What havoc have we seen it work! If there is no such principle still in me; that is, in my flesh, then surely I need not watch against it; there is nothing to watch against. I can never sin, and what awful pharisaism and self-deception will this lead to! I can do without Crhist as an Advocate! Do you desire this? No, we are left in the body; and as long as we are in the body, the flesh, in a deeper sense, is still in us. Left there, that we may learn the lesson of constant dependence and sleepless watchfulness; alas that so often we should have to learn this by repeated captivities and chastisings.

We may now, if God in His goodness permit, consider more carefully this Jabin, and his city Hazor, and his captain Sisera, and Sisera's dwelling place: Harosheth of the Gentiles.

As to Jabin: his name is quite clear, and no doubt tells us exactly what he represents. It means "Understanding," "Discernment," "Intelligence." Not a bad name in itself, is it? But, when opposed to God, it must necessarily have a very bad significance. "Intelligence," in itself is good enough but, as an enemy of God, is a very mighty enemy of Israel, whether past or present, and may well be at the head of a confederacy against her. Jabin then is clearly the fallen, corrupt "intelligence" of man; opposed to God, and ever ready to bring His people into bondage if they are not watchful unto prayer. Time was, when he was slain. In that first, fresh, joyful flush of the victory of grace, Jabin stood no chance of life. When every "high thought" that exalted itself against the knowledge of Christ was cast down, Jabin must surely go; for his very name may be rendered in the

believer's native tongue "every high thought." But, alas, Israel has forgotten what she "once knew;" eighty years of peace have been too much for her; and is she far from being our sad prototype, my dear reader, if "high thoughts" begin to dominate her once more? Oh, watch against Jabin.

His royal city is "Hazor," which is, if translated, "an enclosure," "a place surrounded by a wall." This is surely a very appropriate dwelling for Jabin. The fleshly understanding; narrow, bigoted, bounded on all sides and necessarily bounded by its own most "limited capacity;" admitting nothing that is beyond its powers; necessarily giving out nothing but its own thoughts — surely Hazor is an appropriate dwelling place for Jabin.

But he is by no means content with a wall; not defensive only is he. He will be highly aggressive, and for this he has a captain of his host, Sisera.

We must now ask what does Sisera represent? Scholars — I refer particularly to Gesenius — give us the meaning of the word as "Battle Array."* And this would certainly be most appropriate for the man and his work, for a fighter he is, and would speak of that aggressive form of depraved human reason that is destructive of the liberty of faith.

It is too surely, peculiarly interesting that we should be told where Sisera dwelt. What would it interest you and me to know this, if there were nothing in it but the bare historical fact? This would, again I affirm, be utterly unworthy of God. No, there is something in this apparently trivial issue that is

* The author of the Numerical Bible adopts this; but I can find no divine certainty attached to it, such as one longs for on such questions. And here let me add, that I am conscious that but very few of my readers will be able to test for themselves the meanings given to these names. I am therefore proportionately desirous of being candid, and telling them always of any uncertainty that may seem to be attached to the meaning given, for thus may one count on their confidence, where no such question exists.

necessary for "the man of God" to know that he may be "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Everything must depend on the meaning of the word "Harosheth," for the city is mentioned nowhere else, and we do not much care to follow the guesses of commentators as to its geographical position, but we may be thankful that the meaning is quite unmistakable, for the very word is used in *Scripture. In Exodus 31:5* and *35:33* it occurs constantly and is translated "Cutting," "Carving." Apply it here, and what have we in "Harosheth of the Gentiles" but "The cutting work of those who know not God," for this lack of knowledge of God is ever what characterizes the Gentiles (1 Th. 4).

As these meanings are sure, so are they in perfect, if sorrowful, harmony with all the rest. The whole series tells us that vain, depraved, mental activity, may again take the place of lowly subjection to God's Word; the result is a constant aggressive "cutting." We "walk as men" once more; yea, as "Gentiles who know not God"; and that is clearly evidenced by the "cutting-work" — those sectarian differences that come between the Lord's beloved people. How sad when the Lord thus sells His people to Jabin. No longer are they of value to Him, as testimonies to what His grace can do. No longer do men recognize them as disciples of our beloved Lord, by the evidence of warm true love to one another. The Lord has sold them — they are, in this sense, no longer His "riches" (Eph. 1:18), by whom He can show out what He is. The Lord has sold them, and the "cutting work" goes bravely on; and, by the cutting, they proclaim to whom they are now held in bondage. Ah, the Corinthians were clearly in bondage to Jabin, king of Canaan, as the apostle wrote, "for whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men" (1 Cor.3).

But are we quite free from this captivity to Jabin? Have we no well recognized "circle of fellowship," or church or denomination, far smaller than the "all saints" that our God and Father would have us include? A city, as it were, with its *walls* and *fences* of tests and conditions: the product of our own mental activity, and not of the Word of God, for they shut out those whom He bids us receive to His glory (Rom. 15). Oh, are not many of the Lord's beloved people, who once were clear and free from sectarian domination, dwelling at Hazor once more? The day was, that Hazor seemed gone forever. The fire of the truth, of the Oneness of all saints as forming the One Body of Christ, consumed it to the ground. We would have nothing to do with what divided brother from brother — saint from saint. Alas! is not Hazor rebuilt today, in many a sectarian position, and the same principles are having exactly the same effect? Thank God there is still deliverance; but never until we too confess the truth of the captivity.

There is one word in this sad series we have omitted. We will look at it now: "Canaan" — Jabin was king of Canaan. We have the very word in Scripture: Isaiah 23:8 "whose *traffickers* are the honorable of the earth," and again (Hos. 12:7) "he is a *merchant* (a Canaanite, see margin); the balances of deceit are in his hand." Thus the word clearly means a "trafficker," a "merchant," and that, in a low, bad sense. The Canaanite's one aim, by all this trading, is self-aggrandizement — he seeks his own, not another's wealth; his own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's, for he was alive even in our own apostle's day. And wherever any "cutting work" is going on — wherever there is the spirit of envy, strife, division amongst saints, one may be quite sure that a Canaanite is there: self-seeking has come in — always is there the spirit of Diotrephes, who was a mighty Canaanite in his day, and whose spirit still lives and ever "loves to have the

pre-eminence." When you, my dear reader, seek to build up *your church*, — be careful, there is the Canaanite not far off. If you desire to make proselytes to *your company*, it is the Canaanite. Of course you would not ever expect this to be done openly, boldly, admittedly. Some "good words and fair speeches" must cover it up, and put another face on it; but that face is but a mask, under which are the features of Jabin, the *Canaanite*. May we watch, oh, watch, each one personally, against high thoughts, against the trafficking even in God's truth, so as to exalt self, or any form of self, as is party making, for then surely are we captives to Jabin, king of Canaan.

*Barak and Deborah.*

How humiliating for those who have once known what joyous liberty is, to be again captive. What further shame to be slaves to those who were once beneath our feet! What a still further reproach and laughing-stock it makes us to be again in bondage to exactly the same powers whose yoke was once broken off from our necks! And again I ask, is it a forced application to see in the present divided state of those who had once been gloriously delivered from the "cutting work" of those walking as men; from all sectarian principles; and who have thought, in their unity, to represent the One Body of Christ, a sorrowful antitype of this bondage, and one that makes it thrillingly interesting to us? But, blessed be God, there is still deliverance. "Chariots of iron" are terrible fetters, it is true, and all human strength is quite powerless against them; but they are like the chaff of the summer threshing floor to that Right Arm which is for His people. One thing only is needed — there must be a *cry*. It is discouraging indeed when this is lacking; and alas, and again alas, that we are living in a day when there is but little

"crying;" but rather a kind of despairing contentment with the miserable state of affairs, more like that of Samson's day, when, without blushing, Israelites could say, "Knowest thou not that the Philistines rule over us." So the Lord's people today say, "We must *belong* to some unscriptural church, to some denomination, to some sect or party; we must be in bondage somewhere; we cannot be free from all parties, and in the one Church of God, fellowship all saints." So there is no "cry." But may it cheer us to trace the way of Israel's deliverance.

With ever-increasing care lest Israel vaunt themselves, a woman is now the judge; not even a left-handed man; but one still more expressive of recognized weakness. But her name is exactly what we should expect it to be in a condition of affairs in which God's Word has been superseded by the wisdom of this world. "Deborah," who now judges, means that it is "The Word" which here brings to self-judgment, for this is the clear significance of her name. Once again must the Lord's dear people in lowly self-judgment, have recourse to "The Word" if they are again to be delivered from Jabin. But further, Deborah is married; nor, let us mark it well, may she ever be divorced from her husband. She, too, must be in living connection with another, as "The Word" must ever be to be effective. She is the wife of Lapidoth. Now this word Lapidoth is clearly translated for us in Scripture, so that we are quite sure of its meaning. It is translated "lamps," "firebrands." How simply and clearly is this "The Spirit of God," the only true Enlightener; and thus in Deborah and Lapidoth we have the Word in connection with the Spirit, who alone gives it that power that enlightens, purifies, consumes, *delivers*.

Look at Deborah's dwelling place. No "Harosheth," no *divisions amongst true saints will ever be the effect of that*

*Word when used in the power of the Spirit* — no "cutting work" of that character; but you will find her "under the Palm Tree of Deborah." As we have already seen, the palm tree is in Scripture the figure of prosperity, as it is written, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree" (Ps. 92), and here, of that blessed spiritual prosperity that is ever connected with the judgment of God's Word. Oh, happy place! And it may still be found today. Let but "The Word" (Deborah) judge you: The Word in the power of the Spirit (Lapidoth), and however you may appear to the world to have lost everything as man; to have become poor, wretched, friendless, you are really beginning again to *thrive*; you too are now under "the Palm Tree of Deborah."

But the exact situation of this lovely tree is still further, and very carefully, described for our profit, so that we may not miss our way to it or mistake it for any other. It is between Ramah and Bethel; i.e., it has Ramah on the one hand and Bethel on the other. Now the names of both these places are deeply significant. Ramah means "the heights," and speaks to us of Christ exalted, the true standard of self-judgment, and of our secure standing in Him as thus exalted. Bethel, on the other hand, is the house of God, and speaks of communion only maintained by self-judgment. Here, then, we have two sides of the Christian life: "standing" and "state," as they have been termed, or, as we may perhaps say, Heaven and Earth, each having its due weight to balance us, and to keep us in lowly self-judgment and blessing. "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened." What is this but a call to Deborah's Palm Tree? The last five words refer to the *standing* of the saints in Christ on high, with no suspicion of leaven, i.e., "Ramah," and they are to seek to make this the standard for their present *condition, i.e.*, "Bethel." Beautiful for situation thus is Deborah's Palm Tree: oh, that all the

Lord's redeemed ones may find their way to it. Ramah is well in view on the one hand; from this palm tree, one may see clearly one's wondrous place of security and blessing in Christ risen; that "herein is love with us made perfect — that as He is, so are we in this world;" that notwithstanding all our failures, ingratitude, forgetfulness, wanderings, sins, "God hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob nor perverseness in Israel"; that we are forever "accepted in the Beloved." Then let us turn and look in the other direction, and we find that still we are fully in sight of "Bethel." Communion must still be *maintained by watchfulness, by prayerfulness, by diligence in* searching the Scriptures, by implicit obedience and by dependence.

Thus the whole series of names here is very clear and satisfactory: The Word of God (Deborah) energized by the Spirit (Lapidoth) maintains us and gives us to dwell in spiritual prosperity (the Palm Tree) by judging all that would mar it. Prosperity and fruitfulness abound where that judgment is, and there is a perfect balance ever between our standing on high (Ramah) and our condition in which communion is maintained here (Bethel).

All this must be practically learned before there can be deliverance from captivity; but when the Lord's people have found the Palm Tree of Deborah, they are ready for the next step; the calling of Barak.

Now Barak, in his name, speaks to us very loudly. Barak is the ordinary word for "lightning," and this is simply the manifestation of God in judgment. Lightning is not light in its gracious, beneficent action; but in tempest, wrath and terror. Deborah calling for Barak is the Word of God, leading to God coming in in judgment. "To bring God in is the exposure and overthrow of error: the Day of Manifestation is the Day

of Judgment, when all falsehood expires forever, and no self-deception is any longer possible."*

But Barak is the son of Abinoam and Abinoam, too, is a word very simple and easy of interpretation. "Noam" is "pleasantest," as found in Proverbs 3:17. "Ab-i-noam," then, is the "father of pleasantness." The father of Barak is the father of pleasantness; that is, Barak himself is pleasantness. But can that be possible if Barak is manifested judgment? Yes, for this is by no means so unwelcome a thought at all times as might appear at first sight. To the true child of God in any degree of communion with Himself, with a readiness to justify his Father that is always characteristic of Wisdom's children, the thought of judgment on what is evil, be it in himself or wherever found, is not necessarily entirely unwelcome. Quite the contrary, it is, in one view of it, "pleasantness" acceptable. Judgment on Israel's foes is mercy toward Israel: so she sings:

To Him which smote great kings,
For His mercy endureth forever,
And slew famous kings,
For His mercy endureth forever,
Sihon, king of Amorites,
For His mercy endureth forever,
And Og, king of Bashan,
For His mercy endureth forever,
And gave their land for an heritage,
For His mercy endureth forever,
Even an heritage to Israel,
For His mercy endureth forever,

So listen, too, to that dear child of God, the psalmist: "At midnight I will arise to give thanks to Thee, because of Thy" — what? Goodness? No. Grace? No. But because of "Thy

*Numerical Bible.

*righteous judgments*." They are "pleasantness." In this present day of grace, when God is not dealing with the world at all as such, we may find "Barak, the son of Abinoam," in action against those realities of which Jabin and Sisera were only figures: against all that would exalt itself in ourselves first, "casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God;" and surely it is a blessed and a happy thing when we recognize that God's Word (Deborah) calls thus for judgment (Barak) on such.

For indeed is it not thus, and only thus, that the earth itself is to be purged from its evil, and made new? "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Love is not shocked, as some have assumed falsely, holding that judgment on evil is inconsistent with love. Nay, judgment on evil is a necessary feature of divine love, for so great fear comes on all His people, and "*believers are the more added to the Lord, multitudes both* of men and women." A wholesome and necessary thing it is to recognize that "our God also is a consuming fire"; not God, out of Christ, as sometimes explained; but *our* God is still that towards all that is contrary to His holiness.

To pursue this theme a little further, look at that string of blessings that believers are said to have come to in Heb. 12:

First — Mount Zion, in contrast with Sinai. Grace as contrasted with Law: that is pleasant.

Second — The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem: that is filled with delight.

Third — An innumerable company of angels, to the universal gathering: most attractive is this.

Fourth — The church of the first-born, written in heaven: this is glorious company, is it not?

Fifth — God the *Judge of all.* But does not this break in as a discord, amid all these attractions? Not if you remember the condition of the earth you left behind. Was it as it should be? were things *right*, or all out of order? Did it not need God in just this character of Judge to put it right? Surely it did. So "God the Judge of all" is here, too, a "Barak, son of Abinoam." Love is not shocked at such a display of righteousness, even when the awful sentence, "Depart, ye cursed," is pronounced. His lips will speak it who has been crying so long, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Love and Light are not in discord; but in perfect accord. Love then approves the activity of Light, as we may say; as Light, or Righteousness, now approves the activity of Love.

So Deborah sends to call Barak, and she knows well where he is to be found. His home is in Kedesh-Naphtali, and we must certainly consider with some care this dwelling place of Barak; for if we need him, we shall find him still dwelling in this same holy place, "the sanctuary of the Wrestler." By this may we try the spirits who may present themselves to us under this honored name of "judgment according to God," for indeed many false Baraks have gone out into the world, who are really, themselves, little better than Siseras, although disguised with a veil of much piety of speech. "The glory of God" is a veil under which such an one may seek to hide himself, as in the day of which Isaiah wrote: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at His word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My Name's sake, said, *Let the Lord be glorified*; but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed." Oh, this "glory of the Lord" is a very thick veil, and it is very difficult for many of us to discern what is behind it; it sounds so fair. "Righteous indignation" is very often another false Barak; but neither does he dwell at Kedesh, the "holy place," at all. It is he who

makes us far less concerned for the interests of the Lord Jesus, and for the true welfare of His poor afflicted people, our brethren, than for our own prominence or importance. Diotrephes in his day doubtless claimed to be a Barak; but he was nothing but a Sisera, with a veil on. A true Barak ever begins by leading to sincere and lowly self-judgment first: to "casting out the beam from our own eye;" never by judging our own true brethren, separating from them, or casting them out. There is energy, it is true, as is shown by Kedesh being in Naphtali, the "Wrestler;" but it is a holy, spiritual energy, that discerns well who, and what, is the true foe to be resisted.

Two tribes are prophetically — i.e., divinely — selected to be the instruments of this deliverance — "Zebulon" and "Naphtali": names that speak to us clearly enough; but in a strange paradoxical kind of way. They mean respectively "Dwelling" and "Wrestling"; quiet rest on the one hand and the closest conflict on the other. Peace and War would not seem more opposed than Zebulon and Naphtali; can they march side by side to a common aim, a common victory? Nay, *must* they be thus together? Would it not be better to send Naphtali, "the Wrestler," first to do the fighting, and let Zebulon, "the Dwelling," in natural course, follow after? No, surely; for, incongruous as it may appear, they must go together, in order that we may have some needed lessons that may keep us properly balanced. We have much need of "Naphtali," for we, too, "wrestle," although "not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies." Now there is no form of conflict that puts such a strain on every muscle and fibre of the body as wrestling. Modern warfare, in which the contestants may be very far apart, gives us no such idea of ceaseless strain as does wrestling. There is no rest to mind or body whilst the fight goes on; and can there be then room or place for Zebulon here? Yes, strange to say,

there is; and paradoxical as it may appear, Zebulon may be equally prominent with Naphtali. For, thank God, even whilst "wrestling" we may "rest" in a sense, and that a true sense; and in this very rest find the strength needed for the "wrestling." I'm afraid, dear brethren, we should have small hope of victory in the conflict in which we are engaged with Naphtali alone, apart from Zebulon. If we consider the twelfth verse of Ephesians, sixth chapter, we must bear in mind that there is an earlier one that reads: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Is there not a decided suggestion of "Zebulon" here? If I am to *wrestle successfully with "wicked spirits," who can* supply the needed strength for such a conflict? And if it is His, and not mine at all, then is not that word that was written long before, fulfilled: "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, In returning and rest, shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength"? Are we not justified, then, in singing, as some of us do:

> "Go forth and serve Thee, whilst 'tis day,
> Nor ever leave our sweet retreat."

What is that but "Naphtali" joined with "Zebulon"?

As we look at the spiritual meaning of all this (which is, for us, we may be assured, the *real* one: if we, by the goodness of God alone, have interpreted aright) we shall not blame Barak very much for desiring never to be apart from Deborah. It is true that the honor was not to be to Barak. "Judgment alone is not to have the honor of deliverance." Well, so be it; let the honor go where it belongs; but still we must keep Deborah with us; and then let us again look at what we have: Quiet faith (Zebulon) combined with divinely given energy (Naphtali) under the control of the living Word of God (Deborah), bringing God into the scene; manifesting the character and casting out in judgment (Barak) every mere

carnal reasoning (Jabin). And have we not practically drawn divine lessons from these names, especially when the call is to holiness (Kedesh)?

Before going further, we may glance backward for a moment to note that Hazor, the royal city of Jabin, was also in Naphtali (Josh. 19:36); but we may be quite sure that, in his hands, it can have no good meaning. "How many are involved in the sectarian strife of tongues, supposing that all the while they are doing God service," as another has said in this connection. So Naphtali under Jabin becomes "contention and strife"; no longer the wrestling with principalities and powers (Eph. 6): no longer contending for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1), but a "biting and devouring one another," a "being consumed one of another" (Gal. 5). This is here shadowed in names; it is told out more clearly as the book goes on.

*But there is another dweller in Naphtali:* "*Heber the Kenite* of the children of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, had *severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto* the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh." Now look at him and his tent closely, for in that tent dwells one who is to play an important part in the impending struggle. "Heber" means "the Companion," the "fellowshipper," who severs himself from the Kenites, his natural kindred, in recognition of other ties far stronger, as our Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh was a true Heber when He said, "Who is My mother? And who are My brethren? And He stretched out His hand toward *His disciples, and said, Behold My mother, and My brethren!* For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother."

Thus the tent of him who represents the spirit of love and fellowship that binds all true saints together is not a bad place

to look for one who shall have no mercy on the spirit of contention (Sisera) that divides the Lord's saints. That tent is in the plains of "Zaanaim" — the root of this word is in Isaiah 33:20, where it is translated "taken down": "a tabernacle that shall not be taken down," and the prime meaning is "to move tents." Heber is evidently a stranger here; he has but his tent, and even that is ready to be moved at any moment. Could anything more clearly speak of the spirit of strangership and pilgrimage which must certainly now characterize every one whose heart is with his Treasure, and that is in heaven?

But it is a day of joyful deliverance, and it is our profit and pleasure to trace the way of that deliverance which has its spiritual counterpart in these days, and a more literal one in a time yet to come. For its memories sustain Israel through the dark days that still await her, and she makes it the standard for her prayers against the confederacy of the last days: "Do unto her as to Sisera, as to Jabin at the brook of Kishon" (Ps. 83).

So the battle is joined, and where are those chariots of iron? The victory is with Israel, and a very thorough victory it is, being God's. The pursuit is kept up to the very root of the enemy's strength: Harosheth of the Gentiles: to the place of the cutting-work of those who know not God. Here, where those invincible chariots of iron were manufactured, the Israelites now come as conquerors. But Sisera escapes. His chariot has proved "a vain thing for safety" and he leaves it, to flee away on his feet, and he directs his path away from the rout, to that quiet pilgrim tent of Heber, "for there was peace between Jabin, king of Hazor, and the house of Heber the Kenite." Which is certainly what there ought not to have been. Peace between Heber and Jabin! Between the spirit of sweet and holy fellowship and the proud carnal reasoning of

man that leads to strife! Surely it is evidence enough of things being in a bad way when this is the case. There can be little enjoyment of peace with God, when there is peace with Jabin.

But one comes out from the pilgrim's tent to meet Sisera: it is Jael, his wife, and her name tells us very clearly what she represents to-day. That name means "One who ever ascends." Ah, she is well named and well placed. She is the true helpmeet of Heber, the spirit of communion, and of all, she is exactly *the* one to put to death all that would hinder or mar communion, and make for contention and strife. Sisera made a great mistake in going to a pilgrim's tent for refuge; there is nothing so disastrous to contention between saints as the spirit that "ever ascends" drawn by some lovely unseen (except to faith) Object in the heavens. Hear how our own apostle exhorts us to cherish Jael: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." This spirit will ever slay Sisera and will have nothing to do with the "cutting work" that separates saint from saint. For see again in the very epistle of fellowship, which the same beloved apostle wrote to the Philippians, how Jael puts her tent-peg through the head of Sisera. "I count," says he, "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord * * * I press toward the mark for the prize of the calling on high (or upward calling, R. V., margin) of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore as many as be perfect (*i.e.*, in the sense of the heart wholly set on this One Object above) be thus minded, and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." No; there can be no serious conflict between two hearts both of which are wholly set on Christ in glory — Sisera cannot live then. There may be many differences of views still, many divergences of thoughts and judgments; but

these are as nothing compared with the common attraction in that lovely Person at God's right hand.

And the tent-peg — what a fitting instrument this is now seen to be. It is a perfect emblem of a pilgrim's life, and again let us say nothing is so effective in slaying all contention and strife between believers as this. But we must not entirely overlook the other instrument: the hammer. A nail would be of little effect without a hammer; and "is not My Word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29). It is but another aspect of the divine Word that gives direction, power, and effect to the testimony of a pilgrim's life.

Beloved reader, are these lessons strained? That they are true, you will not be likely to question; but are they divinely intended to be deduced from this narrative? They are either the result of mere human ingenuity, or of divine purpose. Which? The answer to this will surely largely depend on whether the meanings found in the names are fairly and truly interpreted, and as to this, there can be no serious question. There may be slight divergence of views here and there; but, in the main, there will be no material difference possible in the interpretation given to these various names. Surely it is at least not unreasonable to assume that God has not permitted one of them to come into His Word without a purpose, and whether that divine purpose has been by grace discovered or not, must be left to the spiritual discernment of the reader. Such can at least see the perfect consistency between such names as "Zebulon," "Naphtali," "Heber," "Jael," "Zanaaim," "Kedesh," "the tent-peg," and the "hammer."* A consistency that is either nothing but a series of undesigned coincidences, or a divine intention. But one

* I have omitted Tabor simply because I lack clear light as to its meaning. The Numerical Bible gives Mount Tabor as "the mount of purpose."

cannot possibly hold to the theory of mere coincidence long; every fresh witness, or example of it, decreases the possibility of its being coincidence, and increases the probability of design, till this becomes a certainty, and these Old Testament narratives shine with still another light than any historical or even moral truth can give, and they are seen to have a still deeper purpose worthy of their divine Author.

We may more properly defer our consideration of the moral elements in Jael's act till we look at the song of Deborah and Barak in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

# DEBORAH'S SONG

If the victory was, in its measure, worthy of God; worthy of the victory is the song that celebrates it. From a heart on fire, the prophetess sings, and puts into the victor's mouth fitting words to express his triumph and his joy. True poetry has thus a double purpose or effect. It is the relief of the surcharged spirit — the outgush of the heart's emotions in thoughts clothed in words all consistent with the character of those emotions. Deeply stirred must the human spirit be to pour forth itself in what can be truly termed poetry. But it also is as a golden casket that preserves the remembrance of what it celebrates. The deed is kept alive in the song as by no other means, and age passes on to age, in never-fading freshness, what would otherwise pass into oblivion, or be distorted by unworthy additions.

Every great victory must have its laureate. Can Israel feel that at last she is free; and free forever, if she will; without bursting into song? Miriam strikes her timbrel, and the nation catches up and echoes the joyous hallelujah. But *past* deeds alone do not suffice to loosen the full flood of song — these may avail for mere human singing; but a far nobler verse is his who not only looks back on the past, but with equal clearness sees the triumphs of a far-distant future, and whose heart is again on fire with the joy that glorious prospect gives.

Thus did Miriam's joyous faith leap over all the wilderness

journey, and see her people securely planted in the mountain of God's inheritance with the very habitation of God in their midst.

So did Moses, ere at length his body passed to its unknown grave, sing his song: no *death*-song indeed; but a psalm of life and victory; for faith's transpiercing eye in him too looked over all the shame, the sin, the suffering — the moral wilderness that Israel had still to travel, through many weary centuries, ere she reached her final rest, and he too saw that far-off day, not even yet reached, when "the nations should rejoice with His people."

Songs are simply the natural speech of faith that sees in some tender gracious interposition of God, an earnest of the consummation of that same loving-kindness.

Who then can altogether dam up faith's joy when the Son of God, *as a human babe, lies enwrapped in earth's* swaddling-clothes and

"is hushed to rest
Upon a lowly virgin's breast"?

Anna, Simon, Zecharias, Elizabeth and Mary may have been no poets in the world's form of speech; but they *must* sing then.

And, my beloved fellow-believer, are *we* alone to be silent when we too look back at that empty grave in Judea's garden, and see Him who once for us was a prisoner in it, as it were, for three days and nights, on the highest seat in all the universe; a crowned Victor? Oh, we too must surely have our song — feeble and poor enough as it may well be admitted to be — antedating in a little measure that day of final victory, when we shall be raised with Him, and at length, in a satisfied and joyful new creation, God shall be all in all.

But Deborah's is not thus a prophetic song *to the full.* She looks not forward to the final victory. She celebrates the past most worthily, but closes with no prophetic word of strong faith — it is but a prayer. "So fall all Thy foes, O God"; and this is surely not to be lost sight of in its interpretation. Israel is not where she was in the days of Joshua, of Othniel, of Ehud. She is dwelling on a lower level, and that lower level is seen everywhere: in her captivity, in her cry, or the lack of it; in the judge given for her deliverance; in the means and character of that deliverance; and here, in the song that celebrates it.

Doubtless Deborah was a true prophetess; doubtless she was the one link God raised up to maintain the people's relationship with Himself; doubtless it was by divine guidance she called for Barak and sent him forth to war; and doubtless too her heart was warmed by the Spirit of God as it poured itself out in this song. But the song itself is not above the level of the times, or it would not be the perfect expression of man's response to God's goodness under those particular conditions in which Israel then was. It does not follow that because the song is divinely recorded, that *therefore* it necessarily carries in it the imprint of God's approval on all the details it records. It is a human, not a divine production. The fact of its being recorded is divine, and recorded exactly as given. If in anything, or any point, it clashes with God's holy character as subsequently more perfectly revealed, so that with the greater light we are able to detect such defects — God's character does not change nor suffer; the song remains only a correct expression of a dimmer light, and, it may be, a faithful record of what might naturally be expected to accompany that twilight.

Many have been the attacks made upon Scripture on account of its apparent endorsement of what men now judge

as evil — perhaps it would be more correct to say — what the professed enemies of revelation profess to esteem evil. Deeds of highest, purest faith have been characterized as expressions of downright wickedness: Abraham's offering of Isaac has been declared to be exactly in the same moral level with making children pass through the fire to Moloch. It is always Infidelity that assumes a peculiarly superior moral capacity for judging what is and what is not evil, and that thus boldly condemns the Word of God. Little does it avail to say — what is simply true — that myriads of the best and most intelligent of men have not seen any necessity for a conclusion that is as absurd as it is wicked. But here, in this song of Deborah, it is quite true that the act of Jael is exalted as an act of faith, as it was; but it does not follow that a divine endorsement is therefore given to every detail that accompanied the act. No such conclusion is necessary. The mainspring of the deed, as of Rahab's sending the men who came to spy out her country away in peace, was that faith in Jehovah which ever identifies itself with His people and against their foes. But the *lie* that Rahab told is not therefore justified, although it is recorded; nor can we suppose any divine endorsement of any act in any way contrary to His infinite holiness. But He judges according to the light possessed, and takes count of many another element that affects vitally the character of the deed. Let Ananias say, "Yea, for so much," and instant retribution shows the nature of a lie in the full light of God's gospel, and against the Holy Ghost.

A word now as to the song itself. It divides into three portions: First (vv. 1-11) — An incitement to praise in reviewing the deplorable condition of the people, and their glorious deliverance. Second (vv. 12-22) — The elect warriors. Third (vv. 23-31) — The exalted climax and peroration.

First — How consistently these singers rehearse the ways of Jehovah with Israel from the beginning. Jehovah *is* their song. All singing must begin and end with Him, and the sorrows that lay between that beginning and ending must be seen as only the necessary result of a breach with Jehovah. So here, with a joyous clash of cymbals, the song begins, invoking all to praise. But softer and lower soon it stoops into *a chastened minor with the words:*

> The highways were deserted,
> The travellers went by winding ways.
> Deserted were Israel's hamlets — deserted!
> New gods had they got them — therefore the press of war
> approached their gates.

But now this is past, men may ride or walk without fear, where they will, all roads are safe. Now, too, may the maidens fearlessly gather at the fountains, and there rehearse Jehovah's doings.

Second — The thoughts burn afresh. The heart responds to the thought, and again there is the cry, as if in view of *such* mercy, even the prophetess herself needed to be awakened. Her burning heart is but cold, her dancing spirit but sluggish, in view of Jehovah's intervention. So we say again hear the cymbals crash out in accompaniment to the words:

> Awake, awake, Deborah!
> Awake, awake, utter a song!

Oh, may we, too, but get a grasp of what He — our Lord Jesus — has done, and the keenest spirit must ever reproach itself with slothfulness, and cry to all that is within to awake to a worthy praise. Is Barak's victory more wonderful than that of our blessed Lord over all our foes, by His cross? We are, as it were, invited to compare the two by a form of words, twice repeated in subsequent Scriptures:

"*Lead thy captivity captive*, thou son of Abinoam."

The psalmist David, 300 years later, takes up the strain with —

"Thou hast ascended on high thou hast led captivity captive."

And once more the Spirit of God uses this very Scripture: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive."

It is Christ, whose glorious victory is so complete that He not only leads captive principalities and powers (Col. 3:15) — binds the strong man, as it were — but receives gifts for those that had been held in bondage. "Awake, awake," all who partake in that deliverance!

Now mark the impassioned measure, as we almost hear the rhythmic beat of the dancing feet as every tribe that has borne the slightest share in the battle is named. A few from Ephraim, from Benjamin, from Issachar. But again comes the slower measure — the lower note — as the singer turns to those who took no part in the fight:

> Oh, Reuben, why abodest thou by the folds
> Listening to the shepherd's flute?
> Gilead rested beyond the Jordan that he would not cross.
> As for Dan — why did he remain in his ships?
> Asher, too, sat on the seashore sheltered in his bays.
> But Zebulon and Naphtali hazarded their lives to the death.

And again the "fine frenzy" of the singer goes on to the victory itself: Stars and streams fighting for their only owned Lord till we hear the tumult of the rout:

"When struck the sounding hoof of the rushing steed of the flying ones."

Third — Still more intense become the impassioned utterances, nor are mere human ideas sufficient to give them due force. Jehovah must be brought in, both in ban and blessing. The ban on "Meroz," i.e., the "dwellers in cedars," those that choose that ease and luxury of the world that stays from spiritual energy or conflict. They are "the dwellers upon earth" of Revelation, on whom the curse then comes in very deed. Whilst Jael has the blessing; we have already considered the teaching connected with her, how thrilling here the language:

He asks for water, she gives him milk;
In a beautiful bowl she brings him cream.
She puts her hand to the nail
And her right hand to the workman's hammer,
Swings it over Sisera, smites his head,
Shatters and pierces through his temples.
At her feet he lies, he curls himself, he falls,
Where he curls himself, there he falls — *Dead*!

With fearful irony she now sings of the home of Sisera, never to see him more; Where they wait the fruits of a victory that exists only in their thoughts. The song closes with the longing for the final triumph of God, a triumph that means the blessing of all that love Him.

The war is not over. These were but shadows. Still the conflict goes on. May we by grace see to it that we take no doubtful part in a conflict with so certain an issue.

## Chapter 6

# GIDEON

Surely, so excellent a deliverance will introduce a millennium of blessedness. Israel will walk with her gracious divine Deliverer for a thousand years, with constant singing. Alas, no. For "The Deliverer" has not yet come out of Zion, Israel is still unregenerate, and forty years are enough to make the victory but a mere fact of history. In a short forty years His people have forgotten their bondage and their Deliverer, and for the fourth time they do "evil in the sight of the Lord."

Do not think, my dear reader, of this being simply some moral lapse — some side-slip from the path of rectitude. No, no, it is ever deeper, more radical than that. The immoralities and external filthiness are but the evidences of THE evil, not the evil itself. The river's waters are filled with mud and filth, and every evidence of corruption. Will it avail to pick this out piece by piece? No, the trouble is far deeper. *The tide is going down.* So here with Israel. Divine influences have lost their attractive power. Earth's influences have recovered their sway. The tide has turned. Israel's heart has lost its *homing instincts* and forgets its true resting place. At once there is a down tide — this is "evil in the sight of the Lord." Oh, my beloved fellow believer, how soon in the course of the Church did the tide turn. To the very first of those assemblies to whom He wrote, He had to say: "Thou has left thy first love." Was not this again the very "evil in the sight of the

Lord" that lay at the root of all external ills, the downward turn of the tide? And so in the path of the individual, how soon, and how frequently, do the attractions of earth turn us from our goal, and *thus* we, too, do evil in the sight of Him who is so blessedly jealous of our affections. May He graciously speak to us, to His glory, in this fourth captivity of His people, for as the days get darker for Israel so does her experience increase in interest for ourselves, for her condition becomes increasingly like our own. We are living in that darkest hour that, thank God, precedes the dawn; nor are we strangers, I am assured, to captivity to Midian (strife), but we will seek to follow Israel's fortune.

We cannot, in doing so, at all afford to pass over the significance of its being the *fourth*; this number must give its aid to the interpretation. Now, four speaks of testing on every side. There are four corners of the earth; and as the pilgrim passes through it, from east and west, from north and south, do trials come. It is thus the number of *the world* — the wilderness number, as Numbers, the fourth book, is distinctly the book of the wilderness.

Then may we expect to find here this significance of the result of the *world's incursion* into the Church of God.

Whilst the meaning of Midian is "strife" (the very word is found constantly in Proverbs as "the lot causeth '*contentions*' to cease"), Midian is very closely related, and often identified with Moab, Numbers 22:4, 25:1, etc., and both stand for the world in its separation from God. Naturally enough Amalek is not far from Midian; the "lusts of the flesh" are closely allied with "the lusts of the world," and from both spring contention and strife in the professing Church of God. See how James 4 shows the connection between Moab, Amalek and Midian, i.e.: world-loving, lusts and strife. "From whence come wars and fighting (Midian)

among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members (Amalek); Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world (Moab) is enmity with God." Clearly Midian is the principle of carnal strife to which God gives up His people, because of their world-loving, and is it not of sad interest to note the constantly increasing evidence of this? Each lower fall resulting in more developed "strife" amongst His people, till here Israel is in bondage to strife due to the worldly principles that have obtained.

"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 strongholds." Israel is lower than ever before. She is in very evil case indeed. And when God is thus chastening His people, even faith has to find refuge in dens and caves of the earth, where it is followed with tender and extreme appreciation by the ever carefully noting eye of God. Ashamed and distressed is Israel — her Gideons and even Davids may be in dens and caves: sight sees nothing but distress; but "*of whom the world was not worthy*," is the divine sentence. Never is there greater appreciation of faithfulness than in a time of general declension from faith. In no condition of the Church's sad history does the Lord Jesus speak of Himself as being fed; but in the last and worst — Laodicea, then He, even He, speaks of supping. Remember, we are living in those last days.

Note, then, a mark of Israel being on a lower plane than in the day of Barak. Jehovah for the first time sends a prophet. The people need to have their sin brought home to their conscience. The distress has made them cry; but what is back of the distress? This is what the prophet comes for. God's chastening hand is never upon us, merely that it may be withdrawn again; there is some other object in His mind. You are in some trial, dear reader, and you are crying for a

merciful deliverance — it is well; but welcome the *prophet* that would bring the *need* of the trial to your conscience so shall you get not only deliverance but blessing.

Here there is a seven-fold challenge:

1. I brought you up out of Egypt.
2. I brought you forth from the house of bondage.
3. I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians.
4. I delivered you out of the hand of all that were oppressing you.
5. I drave them out from before you.
6. I gave you their land.
7. I said unto you, "I am Jehovah your God."

"Fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell, *but ye have not obeyed my voice.*"

I judge that this prophetic word is indicative of a lower condition than before. The prophet must now precede the judge. "Despise not prophesyings." This clearly does not consist necessarily in the foretelling of future events; but, as here, in a word from the Lord directly to the conscience. We may assume that the prophet's word was not in vain, for we now get the call of the judge.

The angel of the Lord, i.e., Jehovah Himself in his hidden angelic character, comes and sits under the oak that is in Ophrah pertaining to Joash the Abi-ezrite. All speaks here of strength in weakness; this is the one essential truth so easily forgotten, yet ever insisted upon. The oak is the symbol of strength, and the word "oak" in Hebrew is derived from a root meaning strength; whilst Ophrah is from Ahphahr, "*dust*," than which nothing could more vividly picture weakness. This belonged to Joash, "the despairing one," who is the father of Gideon, "the cutter down." Despair of self gives birth to the principle, or spirit, that cuts down all

that exalts itself. The oak is in Ophrah: strength in weakness. All is harmonious and sure.

Gideon is engaged in threshing out wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. Full of the weightiest significance is both the action and the place. In a day of bondage to strife, if we do get a little wheat out of the Word, it can only be done "by the winepress." Ah, what is that but that sacred place, the cross of Christ, where He was bruised as in the winepress? There is ever wheat there, and there alone are we safe from Midian, the spirit of strife, that robs, even to this day, the Lord's beloved people of their food. Midian never finds his way to the winepress, the spirit of strife cannot exist by the cross of the Lord Jesus. Here the angel of the Lord meets Gideon, and this same spot, too, my dear brother or sister, whose eyes now scan these lines, must we much frequent would we be of any service to our brethren in a day of strife.

Note the startling address to poor Gideon, "The Lord is *with thee, thou mighty man of valor.*" *How would such* words fall on Gideon's downcast heart and saddened spirit? Appreciation, comfort, blessing is in them. 'Tis He who knows well when and how to comfort them that are cast down who speaks thus. 'Tis sweet to mark His blessed ways, ever *consistent with Himself through all time.*

How natural Gideon's reply, "Oh, my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" It is the people of God, as a whole, that he has in mind, not himself only, although that was the form of the angel's address, "The Lord is with *thee.*" He was to be the vessel of the Lord's deliverance, the link with the Lord. What an honor! What a joy to be thus addressed! And is not Gideon's recognition of the sad condition of his people, his meditation on all the ways of God in the past, evidence of his being with God? Is not this

the well-beaten track of the flock (Song 1:8), "the ways of them who passing through the valley of weeping make it a place of springs" (Ps. 84). Faith ever turns to the mighty dealings of God in the past. It is a blessed thing when, instead of calling "to remembrance my song in the night," I "remember the works of the Lord, Thy wonders of old" (Ps. 77). There is little comfort in all our past experience, but the memory of his gracious deliverances are bound to fill the heart with cheer.

"Why then has all this befallen us?" Surely the condition of the Lord's people today is not unlike what it then was. A little remnant — here and there an individual — is beating out much food from the finest of the wheat, but secretly for fear of the spirit of strife that robs of all true food. There is surely a Gideon — not one man as then, but a principle: a spirit, as we speak, that controls the Lord's true people and tends to deliver them from strife. You and I, my reader, may have a part in that glorious deliverance if we are ruled by the Gideon principle. Would it not be an honor? Would it not be a joy? Look around. Does it not appear as if the Lord had forsaken His people? As if even the feeble few gathered out of the sects of Christendom had been given over to Midian? Does it not? Do we really need to ask "why is all this befallen us?" Has not "the prophet," the Spirit of God awakening our conscience, made us see that we have been disobedient? We have been governed by the principles, the motives, the aims that govern the world; we have feared the gods of the Amorites in whose land we dwell, and, judging by sight, we exclaim, "The Lord has forsaken His people and delivered us to the Midianites."

But see the next blessed thing. "And the Lord turned His face (as it is literally) upon him, and said, Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of Midian. Have not

I sent thee?"

"This thy might" — what is that? Here is a secret that will be valuable indeed to learn. Look not on Gideon for might, unless it be in his confessed helplessness; but look on the Lord, His face is turned on that weak one. He even He, is sending him. "Ah," we say, "never more does He send His people deliverance, He has forgotten to be gracious." Away with such thoughts of unworthy unbelief. His face is ever turned on the spirit of lowly confession and helplessness, and He still sends such (cf. Is. 66:1-2). Oh, that He indeed may grant us to hear Him so speak.

Gideon is astonished. "*I* save Israel! My family poor in Manasseh, and I the least in my father's house!" All true enough, but only a small half of the truth. "The question is not about the 'I,' but about the Lord." It is ever a great deal easier, as one has said, to confess to poverty in the fleah than to riches in Christ. How often we shirk responsibility, laying the unction to our souls that we are too lowly, too humble. What is it but pride, in a sense, after all? I — I — I. If there were no I at all, then would the Lord have His place, and everything is in order when He says, "I will be with thee." "Every difficulty will be for Me, not thee, to answer. Every foe will meet My Arm, not thine. My Wisdom shall plan the whole campaign, My Power carry it through. My Grace, My Love shall sustain thy helplessness to the end."

Oh, to hear His voice thus today! Does He so speak? Will it be a vain imagination that fancies He does, whilst really He is quite silent? Granted the same conditions: a full, frank, sincere confession to the actual state of things: God's hand upon us for our disobedience, worldliness, pharisaism; still a threshing out a little wheat from His Word, a remembrance of past deliverances, a heartfelt recognition of utter

helplessness, and it is dishonor to our Lord Jesus to question *His* gracious willingness to be with us. His "*face* is surely *turned*" on such a spirit, wherever it be.

Poor, yet much-loved Gideon! He is an excellent and exact expression of the spiritual level of the day in which he lived. Believing, yet timid. True, yet hesitating. Not fully prepared to take in all the flood of goodness the Lord was longing to pour out on His people, yet still following on that he might know more fully, he is a very pleasant subject for us, his poor relations, to look at, and to note the gracious dealings of the One with whom we, at least equally poor in faith, have also to do.

Gideon now wants to get a clearer insight into who it is who speaks with him. But ought there to have been any question as to who it was? Could any speak thus but One? Who but He could *send*, with the promise, "Surely I will be with thee." That is a distinctly divine prerogative, to send away, and yet never leave the one sent, but to accompany him always. It is a divine assumption; and Gideon might have clearly recognized that same voice that the messengers of the chief priests and rulers heard, and of which they reported, "Never man spake like this man" — the same voice exactly that from Galilee also sent His messengers with the same promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

So, chapter 6:17: "If now I have found grace in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who talkest with me" — that is, let me know more surely who it is that speakest to me so graciously, so authoritatively, so utterly unlike anything I have ever heard before.

Yes, Gideon's heart was beginning to burn within him, as all hearts do that hear Him speak. The word of grace coming after the work of righteousness (the prophet, v. 8) is doing its

work. The fire soon to consume his offering has already touched his heart. He must entertain the stranger, he must give, he must offer, but still only as being somewhat uncertain as to the personality of his guest. This is not worship as in full recognition of the divine One with whom he had to do, but he would constrain this wonderful *Heartwarmer* to abide with him a little. And do consider, I beg you, the patient, tender, condescension of Jehovah: "I will tarry till thou come again." Surely this is none other than He who, long years later, would put His poor, bewildering sheep at perfect ease, even by eating with them — the same condescending grace that said, "Have ye here any meat?"

So here He is actually going to sup with Gideon, and the kid and the cakes are consumed, but in a way only Jehovah could consume them. They are accepted, fed upon with the fire of God, and, with this final evidence of gracious goodwill "the Angel departed out of his sight." Just as exactly the same One, only now in other guise — no angel, but much nearer, a Man, a very man — "took bread, and blessed it, and brake and gave to them, and vanished out of their sight."

They knew Him then, and so did Gideon, but why not before? We read, "but their eyes were holden that they should not know Him." What kept their eyes closed all along that wondrous walk to Emmaus? Was it their God's hand, as we often interpret, that was over their eyes? Did the Lord *want* their eyes to be holden that they should not know Him? Most surely not. What was it then? It was this: they were looking the wrong way, and one can never distinguish an object when one is looking in another direction — away from it. Circumstances, filled with depression and discouragement, filled their vision. They were looking at "things seen:" the betrayal, the trial, the shame, the cross, the grave, and there they stopped. So Gideon; he had before him the trying

circumstances of the hour: the captivity, the suffering, the humiliation. "I had expected better of the Lord," says he. "Where be all the miracles which our fathers told us of?" "We had expected more of this crucified One," say these; "we trusted it had been He that should have redeemed Israel." Is it not exactly the same faithless speech — not of rebellious Infidelity; not of "Atheist," or "Mistrust," but of "Little-Faith," as John Bunyan would say. Do you and I never use it? Does not the Church on earth and the remnant of His own in this sad day never use it? Are not our eyes often "holden" by the interposition of distressing circumstances so as to shut Him out? Oh, yes indeed, if one may truly speak for others, we are all of the family of Gideon in this respect.

But His eyes are wide-open now, and listen to this "mighty man of valor," this "deliverer of Israel," who is to "smite the Midianites as one man." "Alas, O Lord God, because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face!" Surely there is hope for any of us! If the Lord's patient grace can bear with such foolishness and slowness of heart to believe — if His compassion can endure such faithless fear — surely we, too, Gideon's "poor relations," may have hope. Yes, we have the same dwelling place, He knoweth our frame, He remembers that its name is "Ophrah," it is but *dust*; and He still, even unto this day, will sustain and strengthen the feeblest confidence: "the bruised reed will He not break." Ever is it out of *weakness* that His poor people are made strong. The weakness must be thoroughly recognized *first*. Jacob's thigh must be touched before He can have any true power with man or with God; then too shall he see God face to face.

Listen, then, to that lovely word so often heard in its majestic authority over the tossing waves of man's spirit, as over Gennesaret's wild waves, "Peace;" and lo in Gideon's troubled soul there is a great calm. All the storm has passed, the clouds have gone, the winter is past, the sun shines, and in

his heart now at length the "time of the singing of birds" has come. And what is the next thing? There is an altar. Ah, that speaks of joy, peace, rest. Things are indeed getting right with *Gideon, for now he not only recognizes the* Lord, *but that the* Lord is *for him*; not only that "God is" — the devils do as much — but "that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Oh, my reader, can you join Gideon here? Have you ever felt the need of an altar? Has your heart ever been so overwhelmed with the exceeding grace of God to *you*, that you *must* worship? Let us hearken, then, to our dear brother Gideon giving his altar a name. What a lovely, what an attractive name it is "Jehovah-Shalom," i.e., "Jehovah-Peace" — not "Jehovah *sends* peace," that tends to put some water to our wines, modifies our joy, puts Jehovah away from us and *sending us* peace from more or less distance. No, no, that will not do. Nothing is between Jehovah and Peace: it is, Jehovah Himself is Peace. Masticate that well, my dear reader, in the teeth of thy faith, and get the comfort and strength there is in it for thyself.

Now, turn to another Gideon who in exactly the same way, calls his altar Jehovah-Shalom in Ephesians 2: "For He is our Peace." What is that but "Jehovah-Shalom," only here it is, if I may express it, "Jesus-Shalom," but it is exactly the same glorious Person. He, our Lord Jesus, has made peace by the blood of His cross. It must be an eternal peace if He Himself made it, if it is none other than Jehovah who *is* Peace. Oh sing, my soul! "Oh magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together" — *Jehovah-Shalom*! What a revelation! I heard with terror the prophet's cry, "Prepare to meet thy God." Where can I go to escape that meeting? The very idea of having to meet God as responsible to Him, and as having to answer for all my ways, is filled with solemn terror. No thicket in Eden was too dense for our guilty first parents; and

from that hour till Adam's children call for rocks to fall on them and mountains to hide them, every sinful child of man has trembled with chilling fear when he has in any measure realized that awful meeting.

But *He* meets *me*! He seeks me in a guise in which I recognize Him not. It is as a man — a lowly, lovely man. I looked for a blow, and lo, a kiss! I expected a reproach, and behold, an embrace! I supposed He would bring up all my sins to visit their just punishment on my head, and where do I find them? On His own head! *On His own head!* And all the waves and billows of divine judgment sweeping over Him, left alone in outer darkness! I expected storm, and the storm has passed over Himself, and I find peace, absolute, perfect, righteous, holy peace. The only true peace in all the universe, never to be broken by being called to account for all my evil ways and wasted years on earth. He has made peace as to all these, through the blood of His cross. Jehovah-Shalom — Jesus our peace. Praise Him forever.

Look at that altar a moment more, one is loath to leave it. Listen to it, for inanimate things have a strange way of speaking in Scripture. It says that there can be no worship without *peace*. One may *work* without peace, and there is a sad lot of it on all hands today; indeed we, most of us, have had our full share of it. One may preach, and teach, and pray, and visit — all without peace. One may be a respected "member in good standing" of the most evangelical ecclesiastical communion; be looked up to in Christian Endeavor or Epworth League, or a hundred other such societies, and yet without *peace*. But one cannot, in any true, real sense of the word, *worship* without *peace*. Gideon had no altar till he heard the word peace. In view of this, what a shocking misnomer it is to call the ecclesiastical edifices that abound everywhere "places of *worship*." May we not

truthfully and with no spirit of carnal judgment (*for we ourselves* were in the same case), say that the mass know literally nothing of what worship truly is; and why? Because they know nothing of a true peace with God. Either a worldly, easy indifference, a false peace; or, under all the outward calm, a chill fear and dread that all is not right with God. Poor souls! May the Lord awaken the careless! May the Lord Himself speak peace by His word to the troubled! Then will they find their worship where their altar is, not on earth; but in heaven. For we have an altar — *Jehovah-Shalom* — our Lord Jesus Himself.

But, on the other hand, having peace, one *must* worship. God has revealed Himself for *us* a Savior-God. No man, woman or child from Adam down to this moment ever received this in faith, but that instantly he became a worshipper. Further, as one keeps simple, lowly, dependent on the same free grace, does not one *continue* a worshipper. We do not leave our altar. We live close to it. The atmosphere is very clear, nothing has been overlooked, nothing is covered, all has been *out*, all judged and put away, we are loved, and "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now for activity. Now to watch, to work, to war. There is another and a rival altar, and it is very near to Gideon, even in his own father's house, and that is where he must begin. The work of deliverance always begins nearest home. None can be used for blessing to others without first a clearing away of everything that is not of God in one's own house. Not a blow could Gideon strike at Midian as long as the altar to Baal stood in his own home. It was these altars that were the cause of the captivity; the cause must go before the effect could cease. Thus revival ever begins: God works the sense of failure deeply on His people's conscience; they become aware

of the altars of Baal in their own household; individually they are found confessing to God in their closets; they cannot and *do not accuse one another, for each has his own Baal-altars to* attend to, and all such accusations stop absolutely. This is ever the first blow that faith strikes at *my own inconsistency, my own folly*. If it cannot do that it can do nothing; it is not faith at all. It is true that it is weak at first. Like Nicodemus, the darkness must cover Gideon at first; he, too, comes at *night*, "and so it was because he feared his father's household and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night." The great thing is it is *done*. Jehovah is once more worshipped. Baal's altar is replaced by Jehovah's altar. The first step, which is always the costly one, is taken. The fear of Jehovah shall drive out all other fear.

Would you desire the honor of Gideon in any measure? Do you want to share in that spirit that ever delivers the Lord's people? Remember, you must not leave the enemy behind you. Judgment must begin *at home*. There is always opportunity for Gideon, i.e., for the principle he represents — never more than today — for men who can cut down their own idol-altars and substitute the Lord's.

It made a great to-do in Abiezer. The enemy roars; it proves he has been hard hit. He wants the life of the man who has cut down his altar. Effective work means fierce *opposition. He will be as gentle as any dove, and allow you to* preach the "sweetest gospel" without a whisper; but cut down any Baal-altars in your own house — his teeth are shown at once. Why is there so little of this today? Not because there are no Baal-altars to be cut down, but so few Gideons to do the work. Is there anything in that line for *you*?

The conflict is drawing very close now, and there is a very serious call for reality in the presence of those gathering swarms of Midian. We can sing our hymns and spiritual

songs, expressive of the most exalted confidence, with wondrous power and unction in our meeting rooms; but when actual dangers impend, all sentimentality is found wanting, the basis of our confidence must be as real as the danger, or trial of whatever kind, itself.

"The Midianite and the Amalikites and the children of the East were gathered together, and went over and pitched in the valley of Jezreel." The enemy is coming in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a banner against him, and this Spirit now comes on Gideon, and he blows the trumpet and there is a gathering of some of the tribes of Israel to him. It is getting very serious, Gideon puts little confidence in his soldiers; in fact, as he looks upon them he seems to see some fresh cause for hesitation, and trembles a little as to whether God has really called him or will really see him through — well, you and I are hardly the ones to condemn him harshly. But we may, and must for our comfort, and His glory, admire the wondrous patience and condescension of God. How should *we* feel if one to whom we had shown so much kindness were to say to us, "If thou wilt keep thy promise — if thou wilt do what thou hast said thou wilt." Should we not be grieved, and angry, and turn away?

I am quite sure that it is a very good thing for us that in this respect "God is not a man," or it would go hard with us. No, He does not slay Gideon for the insult, nor give him a sharp chastening blow; not even one word of reproach; not one. He knows well His poor Gideons, His "mighty men of valor," that after all, they are but dust, and He, in tenderest sympathy, the most perfect condescension, does exactly what Gideon suggests. You see it was not "unbelief" or "mistrust" exactly that asked these signs; but again our poor friend "Little-Faith," and He deals very differently with the one to the other. Let the proud Pharisee and scribe in unbelief ask a

sign, and "there shall no sign be given, except" that which is *the fruit of their own awful guilt in rejecting Him; they provide their own sign in His grave; but "Little-Faith" may* be very bold, and He will give all that is asked. Nay, He will, on occasion, complain if a proffered sign be refused (Isa. 7).

So the first night the ground received no dew; it was quite hard and dry in the morning; but the fleece was so saturated that "waters of a full cup are wrung out" from it. But still poor Gideon says: "This may have been a coincidence. I dare not press forward on so responsible a work without the clearest evidence. I may be deceiving myself — I may have misunderstood Him. It seems impossible that He should make use of so poor and feeble an instrument as am I. I will venture further: I will ask for another sign, and yet I confess my conscience warns me that this does Him injustice — what shall I do? I am tempest-tossed from side to side. Oh, 'let not thine anger be hot against me and I will speak but this once'." It is but the very language of his father Abraham who timidly, yet with much true knowledge of his God, stepped up faith's stairway, in asking for Sodom's safety till he gets to "ten righteous" and dare go no further. So Gideon: do not think, O, my God, that I wish to trouble Thee further — "only this once." Poor, true, timid "Little-Faith!"

It is as he desires; the next morning the fleece is quite dry whilst the dew lies thick on every side. I cannot speak with assurance as to any typical teaching in the "fleece," the "ground" and "the dew" which others see; but I can admire the wondrous patience and goodness of God with Gideon. May I, too, then venture thus to prove Him whether He will do as He as has said? Shall I propose some sign? Beware, my soul, that thou do it not, for it is written for thy guidance, and has been used by thy true Exemplar. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." I judge that Gideon acted directly under

the guidance of that Spirit who was now "come upon him" (v. 37), and who knew exactly all the circumstances of the case; the true confidence in God, the self-distrust in the heart of Gideon, the low state of Israel, all that would so depress and cast down, and who in His sovereignty, led to this request. And, we have, we have actually before us Gideon's sign if we have but skill to read. God *must* bless His people; the dew must fall somewhere. If not on the ground, it must on the fleece; if not the fleece, then the ground. If His grace is so dammed up by the unbelief of His people that no leper in Israel is cleansed, then the dew must light on Naaman the Syrian, and He must send the dew, with His prophet, to a poor widow of Sarepta in the dry, dewless days of Elijah. Solemn lesson! Israel may reject the dew that so long has rested upon her, may be disobedient to the offer of mercy in the gospel, and the Gentiles may be covered with blessings; but let these become "wise in their own conceits," let them not abide, in confessed need, in that "goodness," and it shall once more return to Israel.

Further, all the history of the Church teaches that the dew can never *rest very long on any special company of men, who* are called out for some special testimony to divine grace. Alas, how very soon by lofty assumption the dew is turned elsewhere. So for individuals: only by abiding in Him, in the same conscious helplessness and need as at first, will the dew ever fall.

I would linger a moment more, that this may be impressed upon us. Gideon's sign is on all sides. Look at the dry fleece in that poor nation once so saturated with the dew of heaven; and look at many a company of His people today, who were once the fullest expressions of His grace. I need not name them — my readers will recognize how often we have caused Him to shut up heaven so that rain and dew are much

hindered, if not altogether prevented from falling on us, and must go elsewhere, even back, it may be, to those we may look down upon. If you would have the dew, KEEP LOW.

## Chapter 7

# GIDEON (continued)

This brings us to a narrative, so beautiful, so fragrant with precious teaching that I feel peculiarly the need of God's grace in approaching it, lest we lose the lessons it contains or mislead them.

We are not taken over the battlefield before the conflict begins without reason. Gideon and his army pitch "by the well Harod so that the Midianites were on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh, in the valley."

Now that was a poor place for Israel to pitch, "by the well Harod," for this, being interpreted, is the well of "*trembling*"; and is, we may be sure, suggestive of their fear of the foe which is so soon to show itself.

But the enemy, on the other hand, is by the hill Moreh. Now this word is cognate to "Mohrah," and often found in Scripture as Isaiah 8:12, "Neither fear ye their *fear*" — their *mohrah*, their *object of fear*. So again the *fear* of you — shall be upon every heart (Gen. 9:2). It is an object or cause of fear.

How suggestive it is then, if we find poor Israel pitching at the well of "trembling," to find the enemy at the "terror inspiring" hill — the enemy has surely the best of the strategic position.

But is not this enough? No, God cannot save Israel as they

are. They are too many. If He gives them the victory now, they will attribute it to their own sword. They will "vaunt themselves against God, saying my own hand hath saved me."

What an immensely important lesson; giving the interpretation of how many a sorrow, how many a humiliation, how many a loss in thy history, oh my dear reader, for I assume that you are one under that same gracious Hand. He has to bring low, in order to bless. Before honor is humility. It has always been the same all through the ages; and will be, as long as His beloved people have in them the same evil principle called "the flesh." How emphatically this is brought out in 1 Corinthians 1, "that no flesh should glory in His presence." So as God has a purpose of mercy towards Israel, she must be brought low. Be of good cheer, dear sorrowing, bereaved, afflicted, tried, suffering one. God is preparing thee for blessing, it may be, for the blessing of others. That sickness that has laid thee low shall teach thee lessons never learned in health. That disappointment to thy hopes is to turn thee from false confidences, that thy faith may rest on what is sure. That bereavement that still wrings thy heart is to make thee acquainted with that one Love that alone in all the universe can fill such a void, and thou shalt comfort others with the comfort wherewith thou art comforted of God. Be of good cheer.

But it is God Himself, and not His servant who gives directions for the abasing of Israel. Gideon must proclaim whosoever is fearful ("Harod") or afraid ("Moreh") let him return, and depart early from Mount Gilead, and there returned of the people 22,000 and there remained 10,000.

This first test is simply the one commanded through Moses (Dt. 20:8), "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful

*and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest* his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

*Fear is contagious, and sweeping thus from heart to heart* over numbers, results in what is termed a panic. No fearful one can be a vessel of deliverance: a vessel unto *this* honor; for this fear is born of unbelief, as it is linked with it at the last in Revelation 22. Ah, the heart must be very close to God — very dependently abiding in Christ — not to be fearful in the presence of our foes at Moreh. Even dear Timothy had been drinking a little at that well of Harod. *It is bad drinking water, and his father in Christ reminds him that* "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." We may throw another meaning into the apostle's gracious word "Drink no longer water." Thou hast had enough of those waters of Harod. No joy comes from them, take a "little wine." Turn from earth to heaven and drink into that deep warm love that is better even than the wine that represents it.

Gideon sees his army melt away. Two men out of every three have been trembling at heart, and they depart to take no share in the victory, the benefits and blessings of which will however reach them. Ten thousand valiant-hearted ones are left. God has thus by a word revealed the true inward *condition of that host of 32,000 men.*

Art thou, my reader, pitching thy tent anywhere near this trembling well, looking at all that is opposed to thee by the hill Moreh? Do clouds thicken, and dangers threaten? Doubt not. Throw not away thy confidence that has great recompense of reward. He appreciates thy trust now, when there is really some demand for it, more than men appreciate gold. Victory is just ahead. Give the lie to all circumstances — to all that would deny His love and care. Drink a little wine,

*my brother, thou needest it, for thy "often infirmities."* Come look at that cross on which *for thee*, for none but thee, the Prince of Glory hung and died. Drink of that love, yea, drink abundantly, and you too will not go from Gideon; but stay, even although all around thee go to their tents.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take.
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

But 10,000 men are still too many. Israel will yet vaunt themselves, and attribute deliverance to their own power. Lower must she be brought, and now Jehovah Himself will test them. One by one now, no longer as a whole, they are brought down to the water, and all unconscious of the consequences of the difference, some kneel down to drink, *others take a little water in their hands, lapping it with the* tongue as a dog lappeth. The former is clearly the natural way and 9,700 take it; a pitiful 300 only lap from their hands unnaturally. Whatever this may mean, one thing is evident, it is God letting men express their own judgment — He could have selected any 300 men for the service He had in view — He *lets them select themselves*. It is the one principle on which He ever acts. A man sows, and reaps exactly what he sows; surely he can blame no one but himself for the kind of harvest he has. Men judge themselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46).

There can then be no question but that these differing methods of quenching thirst tell out to us the inward *condition of the drinkers, exactly as did the proclamation* concerning fear. Can we too in any measure discern this? Now first let us look at the water. This certainly cannot here figure, as it so often does, the Word of God. There is no penalty of any kind for "kneeling down to drink" of *that*

pure spring. This water must come from the well of Harod, and must speak rather of the refreshment that this world provides; natural blessing so to speak, not necessarily to be abjured altogether; but to be used as "*not our own.*"

The kneeling to drink was the natural way. It was expressive of a giving up oneself to the drinking. But the unnatural way was, as it always is, the way of *faith.* The taking the water up in the hand is the taking only what *can be held in control.* There is no cessation of watchfulness or vigilance for an instant. The drinker is ready for action at any moment. He knows it is a time of conflict and of danger. Israel is in bondage and needs deliverance, and in view of this he cries, "All things are lawful for me; but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me; but *I will not be brought under the power of any*" (1 Cor. 6:12). That is, I will *not kneel to drink; but take it in my hand.*

Now surely, we can have the key of the second test by which 97 per cent failed! Just think of it, and let the Word like a sword pierce to thy conscience, my soul. It is no question of salvation, God be thanked — what a bad way we should be in if this rested on anything in ourselves — but it is a question of being honored in service, and how few qualify for this. First, unbelief sends away 22,000 — a looking at difficulties and not at God. Of course, these cannot be trusted. They are just the ones to take to themselves the glory for a victory. Then the heart set on this world; and that not exactly in a sinful way, I judge, but giving one's self up to it; *using it as if it were our own.* Not being satisfied with just so much as our hand will hold — as we can control fully; oh, this altogether unfits for service. The 300 were those alone who were least likely to vaunt themselves. They had the deepest, truest sense of their own nothingness. They gloried, indeed; but it was in the Lord, and they thirsted for the battle. Their

action spoke joyous confidence in God, a conviction that He was quite able to save, and they were ready to be used.

*My dear reader, let us each take this home to ourselves.* How often does God lead us to the water of Harod to try us there? puts in our way the innocent pleasures of this world in a hundred different forms — healthful recreations, literary enjoyments all as harmless as water; and we, all unconscious of the test, bow ourselves to them and *kneel down to drink*! A few there be, who recognize that the time is short, who weep as though they wept not, rejoice as though they rejoiced not, buy as though they bought not, use this world as not being their own. A few there be who recognize the bonds about the beloved blood-bought flock of Christ, and who are willing joyfully to keep themselves free from the controlling power of anything this world can give, however innocent, that they may be used for deliverance and blessing.

This winnowing has resulted in only one in every hundred of the original gathering being left. Oh, how careful the Lord has to be in a day of weakness lest poor "Israel should vaunt themselves." Look at the opposing forces, three hundred only on the one side, against a host "that lay along the valley like grasshoppers on the other." Now, Gideon, listen to divine counsel: "What king going to war against another king sitteth not down first and consulteth whether he be able with 10,000 to meet him that cometh against him with 20,000?" Sit thee down, Gideon, and consult. "Art thou able with a bare 300 to meet that innumerable host? Would it not be prudent even now to desire conditions of peace? There is not a sword or spear among all thy little company. How dost thou expect to win this fight?" That is how flesh, sight, unbelief always reason and the ways of faith do appear so very unreasonable on the surface; but unbelief always omits one single item: God.

And is it not so with us, my beloved brothers? Lower and lower has our Lord seen it necessary to bring us — humbling *after humbling has come upon us — more scattered than ever* the true flock appears to be, but the enemy's ranks are untouched and compact; *he* has not lost a man; there is no diminution of *his* strength. Yet, let us listen: "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the balance they are altogether lighter than vanity" (Ps. 62:9). Vanity means just nothing at all — a cipher. So the 300 — men of low degree, if you please — are 300 ciphers and Midian's hosts — men of high degree, perhaps — yet are they a host of ciphers. Now, a million ciphers are of no more value than three. Each company is equally helpless. But suppose one comes with the three, and instantly the 000 become 1,000 — and now where is the strength? With the innumerable string of ciphers lying there in the valley or with the 1,000? Oh, to see with the eye of faith! Oh, to count according to the reckoning of faith. Unbelief always counts the ciphers, but omits the *One.* Faith takes no account of the ciphers, but rests everything on the *One,* and looking at Him, says, "We are well able" — "I can do all things throught Christ who strengtheneth me."

Let us be of good cheer, dear reader; we certainly cannot boast in numbers, but we still have a promise that gives infinite capabilities, not alone to 300, but even to "two or three" gathered in helpless dependence on *one* Name. The power is in Him *ever;* in the numbers *never.* Oh, for grace to count Him in, and count on Him alone with simple confidence to the end.

But to return to our narrative. God is good, and He knows well the need faith has of much refreshment in such a day as that of Gideon (to say nothing of our own). He, in tenderest consideration, suggests another sign to confirm and

strengthen Gideon if he fears to go down, and at the same time keep him in that lowly sense of helpless dependence, *which is his (and our) safety.* He and his servant, Phurah (a name which is not without significance, for it means "growth," as the evidence of a healthy life), creep up close to the lines of the Midianite host, and listen whilst a man tells a dream, that he has just had, to his comrade: A cake of barley *bread rolls into the midst of the Midianite camp; strikes a* tent, and fells it to the ground.

The cake of barley bread is clearly a figure of utter insignificance in contrast with the tent it strikes. But what cannot God do even with barley bread — the simplest kind of food, and doubtless a figure of that by which man alone lives; the simplest portion of the Word of God, elementary or fundamental truths: these are quite sufficient to overturn the tents of strife. Paul rolls, as it were, a cake of barley bread into a similar camp in Corinth when he says: "Was Paul crucified for you?" And we still by God's mercy have many *such a cake of barley bread in that word. How often through* God's goodness we see it work in a company of His people, where a spirit of mutual distrust and division has intruded — lo, some simple precious truth of the love of Christ is ministered, and down fall the tents of wickedness. All the saints are so warmed again, and delighted with the sweet old music of the gospel they have known so long, that their hearts, of late so hard toward each other, melt — Midian or strife goes.

Happy is Gideon now. He is, as it were, with his forefather Jacob at Bethel at the very gate of heaven, and he must again in spirit use his altar, Jehovah-Shalom, and worship. Now, too, he is fully prepared for the conflict. Yea, to his faith it is over, as he says, "The Lord *hath delivered* the host of Midian into your hand."

It is a strange conflict and his little army is strangely provided. They are divided into three companies of 100 each, and in every man's hand is a pitcher enclosing a torch, and in the right hand a trumpet. But there is perfect unison, no division between them; all are governed by one leader, himself. What he does, they do, when he blows with the trumpet, all give a similar blast, and break the pitchers in their hands, and hold aloft the torches which now unhindered, throw their light on the surrounding darkness.

But how foolish it all sounds, does it not? Think of the folly of pretending to go to a deadly conflict against overwhelming odds with one hand grasping a trumpet, the other an earthen pitcher with a torch in it! What foolishness! Aye, but let us not be too hasty, but remember that long after this one wrote, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men," and it is by just such means as these — means so apparently utterly inadequate and foolish — even by the "foolishness of preaching," God still works eternal salvation. But we anticipate.

Let us at least look at this strange sign a little closer and seek, as God Himself gives grace, to throw on it such light as His Word affords.

First as to the trumpets. There were two kinds of trumpets used in Israel of old. Turning to Numbers 10, we read that Moses was commanded to make two trumpets of *silver*, and that these were for the use of the priests, the sons of Aaron, for the calling together of the congregation — for starting the various camps in perfect order on their journeyings — and for the expression of joy in connection with all the ministry of the tabernacle. Oh, well is it that they were made of silver. By the *redemption*, of which that silver ever so perfectly speaks, alone can we joy in our Lord. A silver trumpet call still gathers His people together, and it is with such a trumpet of

pure grace that the final signal will be given for our upward flight on that happy bright morn, when the dead in Christ shall be raised and we, changed, shall together with them go to be forever with Him. The "last trumpet" is a *silver* trumpet (1 Cor. 15).

But there were other trumpets of quite a different material, as in the original they are specified by a very different word. Not of silver, but of *ram's horns*, speaking of power and energy and they were sounded, as it were, in defiance in the presence of the enemy. It was these that the scoffing inhabitants of Jericho heard day by day encircling their city, till Israel's shout joined with the trumpet blast and their walls fell flat in a moment.

Now it was these trumpets of ram's horns that were in the hands of Gideon's men, and they expressed strong confidence, a well-founded courage, a boasting never to be rebuked or forbidden. These were held in the right hand, the significance of which we shall see directly.

In their left hand were pitchers. Look at these pitchers in the light of 2 Cor. 4: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of power may be of God." These pitchers then beautifully expressed the men who held them. Man as such is but a poor pitcher, an earthen vessel, and what can God do with such? Break him, that is all. As long as the pitchers were unbroken they were worse than useless. They only hid the light within them, and prevented its outshining. The pitcher must be smashed, and now the hand that held it — the confidence that is still lingeringly attached to the earthen vessel — changes its hold to the lamp or torch — in absolute dependence, it is true, for it is in the left hand which speaks of realized weakness; but the light shines out unhindered. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has

shined in our hearts to give forth the radiance of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4).

Oh, to learn this lesson in our hearts from God! This is the consistent one that runs all through Scripture. We may say, paradoxically, that to be of any use, the earthen vessel must be smashed, otherwise it but hides the light within it. Must I break myself then? How impossible. All that any one of these 300 Israelites had to do was just to open his hand, and the pitcher would smash without any difficulty at all. Look at a man dropping a pitcher in Rom. 7: "Within me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" "sin dwelleth in me." There is not much confidence in himself there, is there? His hand, which is ever the figure of confidence, is loosened from the pitcher and it goes, as it were, to its kindred dust of death; it is smashed.

Then are we to learn that to break the pitcher is equivalent to having no confidence in the flesh? Exactly so, and there is just one spot where we may look, with a broken and contrite heart, and see God Himself breaking the pitcher, and that is to the central cross on Calvary. Oh, look, my beloved brother and sister, look. If there is one atom of good in the flesh it will be seen in that searching light. Nay, even the thrice holy One there, looked at as what *I am*, is condemned unsparingly. God there condemns sin in the flesh, and I am nothing else! Is not the pitcher smashed thoroughly. Have *I* to break it? No, truly God has done this once and forever. I but hold by faith with what He has done.

We may see another picture of a smashed pitcher and a trumpet sounding at the same time in Philippians 3. "We are the circumcision who have no confidence in the flesh" — then the pitcher broken — "but rejoice in Christ Jesus;" there is the bold trumpet-sound.

Mark it well, dear reader; these two things always go together: he only who breaks the pitcher can blow the trumpet. Only as there is no confidence in the flesh can there be a boasting in Christ Jesus, and I may say, speaking from experience, in which perhaps others will join, it is not an easy thing to learn either of these precious lessons. We do not find it so difficult to *talk* much of our poverty in the flesh, who rarely think of our riches in Christ. But what does all that complaining mean? It means that we are still expecting something from the flesh, and are disappointed. If we expected nothing — literally nothing — that would mean that we had learned the lesson of a broken pitcher.

Permit an illustration. I have a vessel from which I have often sucked impure, filthy slime until, sick and dying, I learned of a spring of crystal waters, and in obedience to the command of another, I cast my vessel to the ground and take a draught from the spring. Still I cannot altogether leave the broken sherds, but hang over them and mourn over their sad state. "Alas," I cry, "what a wretched thing, I can get no water from, or in, thee." What would you say? You would tell me that my being disappointed told the story that I still had *expectations* of good from the potsherds, and you would counsel me to leave once and forever the miserable bits of earth, with the rebuke, "How can you care for them when an exhaustless fountain of living waters is within your reach?" Exactly so, my readers, does not everyone who mourns over himself, speak of an *expectation* of something better? You are disappointed. You still anticipate something else. You have not yet so learned that there is "no good thing" there as to leave it altogether. Forget it, and abide in Him, your risen, living, loving Lord and Savior, who is the only fountain of living waters forever. Then would your music alter, and a joyful sound of holy boasting take the place of your bitter

groan. Oh, may you, dearest brother or sister, whose eyes scan these lines, learn in the depth of your soul, the utter helplessness of yourself as identified with the flesh, and see that God has judged you with an everlasting judgment, and will you not say "Amen" too, for him who pens this prayer for you!

We ought to be boasters. The world has its trumpets which are sounding loud, and far louder, as time goes on, in boastfulness in the first man and his works. The chosen of God ought to lift up their trumpets and make their boast in the Lord. There is nothing that so imparts courage to others as the sound of boasting — true boasting — justified boasting! Hear the sweet singer — may I not say, our beloved brother — David — on his return from a king's court to that poor cave of Adullam: "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord," and what is the result? "The humble shall hear thereof and be glad." Oh, let us never be content with less than a *boast*, but let the boast be always in the Lord. But we have omitted all reference to the lamps or torches, whose light flashed suddenly on the darkness in that far off time. Where may this be seen today? Wherever, through a broken earthen vessel, Christ is seen. He alone is ever, at all times, in all places, the Light; and as His people show Him forth, on the principle of "nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," does the Light shine.

If a bright light shine in a dark place, it attracts all eyes to itself. In New York harbor there is a lofty statue that every eye, passing by daytime along this busy waterway, gazes upon with interest. But when night falls, there blazes out from the torch, held high in the statue's uplifted hand, one star-like light alone, and then there is no statue to be seen, the hand that holds the light is hidden in the shadow of the very light it carries. So, dear reader, the more thou exaltest Christ alone in

this world's darkness, the more hidden wilt thou be, and the better wilt thou fulfill the purpose of thy new creation.

One word more to finish the chapter. The victory is complete, and it is strikingly in accord with God's righteous principles. The children of strife, i.e., Midian, consume one another. Compare Galatians 5:15. Two princes are captured, Oreb and Zeeb, and who can possibly deny the significance of names, when we learn these words are repeatedly used in Scripture! Oreb is "the raven," and Zeeb is "the wolf." What could express "corruption" and "violence" more graphically — the two forms of evil, in which it ever appears all through the Scripture? The raven is an unclean bird, as opposed to the dove — it is the bird of *darkness*. The wolf, the fierce destroyer of the lamb. Thus here the raven, or corruption, is slain at the rock Oreb, and the wolf, or violence, comes to its end at the wine-press of Zeeb. Thank *God, these are not difficult to interpret at all; the "rock" and* "wine-press" are both found at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is the sharp rock and the wine-press of judgment, and there all corruption and violence must make their end. *They cannot live there.*

Be sure that whenever the Lord's people are captive to Midian: "strife," Oreb and Zeeb are not far off. They are the princes of strife still; or in plain words, wickedness is at the root of fratricidal conflict. Drag it to the cross of our Lord Jesus, and let it lie slain there.

## Chapter 8

# GIDEON (continued)

"Again I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this is a man envied of his neighbor. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit;" and so Gideon is now in measure experiencing; for Ephraim, that "great people" (Josh. 17:17), chides with him sharply. So it is ever, and will be down to the end of time: it is ever the "great people" who resent anyone else being honored in service but themselves. In proportion as one is important in one's own eyes, one has little joy in the Lord's victories through other means, or by other instruments.

This incident too serves to give a very sorrowful evidence of the inward condition of Israel. What power could Midian or the children of strife have ever had, if the *spirit* of strife had not been there. The very victory is made a basis for quarrel and chiding. Alas, nothing can prevent this when we are away from God. Everything that our brother does is wrong; everything he says has a different meaning from that intended. The worst construction is put on everything, and there is a steady trend to alienation and separation — this is captivity to Midian. Here then, we have another and a stronger hint of that fratricidal conflict, which is the mark of the end; when ties that God has made to unite brethren as one, have lost their power, and "brother betrays brother." Weapons that were meant to be used against the common enemy — the Canaanites — are turned against Israelites!

Gideon, for the time, averts the shame and sorrow by lowly-mindedness. How beautifully this exemplifies the force of the apostle's word: "Fulfill ye my joy that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." But what is the path that leads to that happy goal? "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus." Longing, not for the highest, but the *lowest* place; ever seeking to get, not *above*, but *below* my brother; to be, if possible, even more unseen, unnoticed, unknown, and in "honor preferring one another." What can Ephraim do against such a spirit as that? And the well-loved Gideon, I say, beautifully exemplifies this. He will have no strife where Israel needs unity. "What have I now done in comparison of you," he says. When pride is met by such lowliness, it is *ever the worse for pride*; when it is met *by* pride, then comes contention and strife between brethren, and a shameful conflict ending in mutual destruction. Gideon's answer was surely wise and well-pleasing to God; although foolish Ephraim seems to have nourished the sense of his own importance by it, and this led to his bitter humiliation later, by another hand less able, or less willing to endure his vauntings.

The great Ephraim, however, is quite satisfied with the death of the princes, and leaves Gideon with his 300 to keep up the pursuit alone. Oreb and Zeeb are slain; but the *kings* remain alive; and, for this little band, the Lord's victory is not complete, as long as Zebah and Zalmunna live in freedom.

So they pass over the river Jordan, "faint, yet pursuing." The same spirit that would not kneel down to drink still upholds them to press on; hungry and weary, but hating what He hated, they "bear, have patience, and labor" — keenly appreciated, too, this ever is, as the record of it here, and in a much later day, shows.

But Gideon gets little fellowship from those from whom he might reasonably expect it. The men of Succoth, in that flippant unbelief that is ever out of harmony with God's ways, sneeringly ask, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thy hands, that we should give bread unto thy army?" Degenerate Israelites! Their very city, "Succoth" or "Booths"—so long dwelt in by their fathers whilst they possessed not the land that was theirs in title — should have told them a different story. But nothing short of actual possession has any weight with them now. They own the power of "things seen" and nothing else. Well, in a little while "thorns and briars of the wilderness" shall teach painful lessons to the men of Succoth; and I'm afraid, dear reader, you and I sometimes need the same painful inflictions: the sufferings and anxieties of life: those sharp wilderness-thorns, teaching us that "present things" are not all.

Next they come to Penuel, a place also of holy memories, for it takes us back to that wrestling of Jacob, when the "sun rose upon him as he passed over Penuel," halting upon his thigh; but he had learned a wonderful lesson since that sun sank last night over the western hills. He has learned the strength there is in absolute weakness, when cleaving to God; and, in a deeper, truer sense, the "sun has risen on him," for there is a new sunshine in his heart, that was so overclouded yesterday. Surely the dwellers in such a place must recognize a true son of Israel in poor Gideon, and his "faint yet pursuing" 300. Not at all. They have let that precious truth slip. Doubtless they made their boast in living in this historic spot; they were "Penuelites"; they could point to the very place of that wrestling of old. If they had lived in modern times, there would have been a statue to Jacob in the market-place; but they knew nothing of the precious lesson Jacob had learned at the cost of a lamed thigh. No, indeed, *they* had a

tower, and in this was their confidence.

My dear readers, what searchlights into our own hearts are these incidents. Our fathers have been with God — have wrestled until, in helplessness, they hung upon Him, discovering that power with Him lay in realized weakness. We are now in the very place they gained for us; but do we still hold that truth of the power of helpless dependence, or have we our "tower" — some fleshly confidence? Have riches increased? Have they become our "tower"? Have we gathered a great stock of intelligence in divine truth? Do we know "Church Truth," "Dispensational Truth," "Prophetic Truth," and are we, perhaps almost unconsciously, making this to be our confidence, our "tower"? I am deeply persuaded, beloved, that we may well challenge our hearts faithfully on these points, for this is ever the course of poor man age by age; he is a great tower-builder.

The "tower" must go, and so shall every confidence of your heart, dear child of God, till you return to your true rest in Himself alone; and often a painful thing is the breaking down of towers.

But still as long as Zebah and Zalmunna are alive Gideon cannot pause. He still pursues, and at length comes upon them at "Karkor" for here they judge themselves to be quite secure. It is, as the name implies, "The City of Destruction,"* this doomed world that appears so stable and secure, where the worldling ever takes refuge and says, "Peace and Safety" (1 Th. 5:3). But suddenly, "as a thief in the night," the blow falls, and Zebah and Zalmunna are captives.

But who are these "kings"? They seem to bear close kindredship with the "princes" — Oreb and Zeeb — whom we saw slain in the previous chapter. We are entirely

*Cf. Num. 24:17 where it is rendered "*destroy*."

dependent on the names for our interpretation. Zebah then is "a religious sacrifice," "a slaughter made in sacrifice." Zalmunna is "a forbidden shadow," "a spiritual death-shade." Now can we not see some sort of correspondence between the kings and the princes? Oreb is the Raven, the bird of *darkness* — he is the prince. Zalmunna, the unholy Darkness itself, is the king. So Zeeb, the wolf, the beast of *Cruelty* is the prince. "Zebah," the religious slaughter, is the king. But why this distinction between prince and king? Why is Oreb a prince and Zalmunna a king? I can but speak in the way of suggestion, not dogmatically. There seems to be a direct connection with the unseen spiritual world in these latter words; and, of course, since the connection is evil, it is with evil spirits. The "princes" appear to represent evil, of their respective character, in *man*; the "kings" that which is back of this, in him whom man serves as king: the Prince of this world. It is a deeper character of evil, superhuman, diabolical. Oreb and Zeeb may be simple qualities of fallen human nature; Zebah and Zalmunna spiritual wickedness controlling and using the merely human, as the king does the prince. Of course the slaying these, is not literal; but figurative of bringing the power to nothing. The enemy has no power against faith, "faint yet pursuing." The cross of Christ puts an end to them.

But the youth Jether has not strength for this. It is not every one who can put a "king" to death. Saul could slay common people, but he could not kill King Agag. An older arm — a scholar who has been longer in the school of God, and learned of another strength than his own — can alone do this, and Gideon himself effects it.

We now come to a sorrowful but very interesting incident. Gideon learns, as so many have done, that the moment of victory is the moment of danger. He is proof against the cry

"Rule over us." He puts away from him and his descendants the proffered crown, and yet he would much appreciate some memorial of this mighty deliverance. He asks for the jewels of the captive foe, and with these he makes — not a golden crown — but a golden priestly ephod, and hangs it up in his own homestead, Ophrah, where the angel of the Lord at first appeared to him. It is a pious act on the surface. It proclaims so strikingly the faithfulness of the Lord's word: "Thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." It is hung up solely for the Lord's glory; but notwithstanding all this, it is a great mistake, for it "became a snare to Gideon and to his house."

And has this no lesson for us? Do those who have been in any little measure used for the Lord's glory never hang up and expose the spoils of their victory? And do the Lord's people never put the feeble instrument in the place of Him who has deigned to use him? We tell of our work — of the victories of the gospel — of the blessing given in the ministry of the Word — all, of course, solely for the Lord's glory; but in this are we not really often — not to say always — hanging up trophies in Ophrah, for do they not exalt *us* too? Have not *we* been the honored instruments? And as poor Israel goes away further from the Jehovah whom Gideon thinks alone to exalt, and begins to adore the ephod, so now today, the Lord's people put the poor, feeble instrument of blessing in the place of the Blesser Himself. The same story ever: there is a sad law of gravity earthward. Moses makes a burning serpent, lifts it high upon a pole, and all who look thereon live. Look forward a few centuries and see crowds adoring the brazen figure itself, as being the Source and Spring of blessing. The eye of flesh always sees only the figure, not the Lord behind it; and Hezekiah has to break it all up with the word "nehushtan," "it is but a piece of brass." Oh how soon we give to the creature the place of our all-blessed, all-gracious, all-powerful, all-wise God Himself. He calls a poor monk

from his cell at Erfurt, and uses him mightily — and lo now we have a "Lutheran Church" pledged to all the errors of its founder, with his joyous faith by no means as prominent. Again He picks up a Wesley or a Whitfield or many another honored servant, and again and again His people put the instrument in the place of the User of the instrument, and make him a kind of standard: a court of final appeal. It is a great snare.

God never merely repeats Himself — we never get a mere repetition of a deliverance in Israel. New foes arise, and a new kind of vessel of deliverance is needed. Othniel was exactly the one to oppose Chushan-rishathaim, but not for Eglon of Moab. Ehud is now the one, nor will a repetition of *him* do for Jabin. So Gideon has fought his fight; now let Israel look up to the God who gave Gideon, and other deliverers shall be sent to meet the new conditions.

We, too, beloved, live in a day when many an honored warrior has but comparatively recently laid down his arms and gone to his rest. Practically a generation of deliverers has passed away. We, too, have their memories with us, and we rightly honor them, whilst a hundred weaklings would press into their place, and vainly seek to assume and fill the position they held. But today, too, God does not repeat Himself. Other forms of danger threaten us than in their day, and He still has *other* characters of deliverance; *other* means of blessing awaiting; and the wisdom of faith is to "wait only upon God." Our book will, if God in His grace permits, teach us much on this line.

Dear reader, I want to speak to thee as if we were alone together. Art thou ministering, in some way, God's precious Word? Hast thou been used in blessing? Have the Lord's people wanted to give thee thanks and praise for the ministry?

Hide it all, rather than hang up in display the trophies of thy success. Deceive not thyself with the thought that thou art only thinking to proclaim His faithfulness. Here is a snare — and thou knowest well that a snare is very subtle and not recognized at first at all, or it would not be a snare — there is a snare in it, for thee and thy house.

Or art thou just a simple Christian, with no such temptations; thy ministry is of so hidden a character as to relieve thee of this. Then look to it that thou dost not injure, or ensnare the poor human instruments by putting them in the place of thy God Himself. They have passed, or are passing away; He lives today; lives to respond to the confidence of the poorest of His people; lives to use the most unlikely instrument for the blessing of His much loved saints; lives to listen to every cry; and — strange word — ever commands us to pray Him to send laborers into His harvest.

Is it not a strange word? Whoever heard of a landed proprietor telling anyone else to ask him to hire laborers to gather in His harvests? Would you not say: "If you care so little about your own interests, as to need to be asked by others to send laborers into your fields, your crops may as well go unharvested." Yes, yes. So men think; so it looks on the surface; but look a little deeper, and see if it be not a wonderful, tender, gracious invitation for us *to share in His interests:* to feel with Him in the throbbing tenderness of His heart for poor lost men: to see with His eye the fields white for harvest. A man would never take counsel with or expect such request from a *stranger*, about his harvest fields; but would he not love those nearest and dearest to him — his own *sons* — to be equally interested with himself; would he not encourage this in his own family? So the Lord says, as it were, "Let Me see your interest in My interests on earth; let Me learn who among you cares for these fields so white for

harvest; who shares My sorrow at the sad condition of My people; who enters into their captivities; who longs for their deliverance; whose cry do I hear to send out laborers? 'Tis all I ask, I *shall then know where to find the laborers to send.*"

## Chapter 9

# ABIMELECH

As long as Gideon lives all goes well, at least externally, with Israel. But Gideon cannot live forever, he passes away, and with him passes all Israel's piety. Her poor heart is still not won by all her Lord's kindness, and it turns to "Baalim," which is but another name for those enemies of God and man: the demons, to whom the heathen sacrifice. In this word "Baalim" (meaning literally "*lords*" i.e., exalted ones) lies the key of all that follows; for is it not strange and significant that here even men themselves have lost their own true name, and are also called, all through the chapter, "*baalim*" or lords? Our Authorized Version, it is true, translates this word "baalim" as "men" — the *men* of Shechem, (vv. 2, 6, 7, 8, 18, etc.) — but the significance of the word used is lost thereby. They are all "lords" now, every one aims to be uppermost. They have a moral character consistent with the object of their worship (cf. Ps. 115:8), and are thus named according to that character. They are "baalim" filled with the same spirit of self-exaltation as ruined him who is called the devil (1 Tim. 3:6).

What can be the result of such a condition? No external conqueror is needed. The internal leaven works in its own way, in puffing up and exalting. First, one assumes the place that Gideon would not have at all; and as he is the prominent personage of the chapter we must look at him a little closely. His name is suggestive: "Abimelech" means "my father a

king." And that there is a *divine* reason for the name is soon clearly manifested. If the father had scruples about reigning over the Lord's peoples, the *son* has none. At all costs he will exalt himself to the highest place, and through treachery and bloodshed he attains the coveted honor. He slays all his father's sons, save the youngest, who escapes. He is indeed a worthy exponent of the worship of "Baalim" — himself a "baal."

But is Abimelech to be discerned today in any sense? Is he forever gone — dead and buried; and is there nothing that answers to him? Is there no spirit ever seeking to "lord" it over God's heritage? That very word suggests an answer to these questions. Peter warns, I judge, against the Abimelech of this age, when he says "Neither as being 'lords' (mark the word, exactly equivalent to that so constantly used in our narrative: 'baalim' — lords) over God's heritage" (1 Pet. 5). This is exactly what Abimelech desired and claimed, on the basis of his succession; i.e., because he *was* the son of his father. How the light begins to shine here! He, from whom he claims succession, most earnestly disavowed the very position and dignity that Abimelech claimed on the strength of *being* his successor. Does it not speak? Is it not eloquent? Have we far to look to see a spirit everywhere manifest in Christendom, that claims ecclesiastical lordship on the strength of *succession*; yes, and succession from one who *earnestly repudiated that very exaltation*? Let us not mince words or evade the clear truth: the pope, the cardinals; the whole hierarchy of a false church that owes its very existence to no lawful — but an illicit — alliance between the Church and the world, just as did Abimelech to that of Gideon with the concubine of Shechem; this false church is the successor of Peter. "Abimelech," it cries, "my father was king. He was the rock on which the Church was to be built, and here am I, the veritable son and successor of St. Peter." How true, in

every detail, is the reality of this day, to that picture of it in that faraway time. Gideon had cut down these altars to Baal; and listen to the same spirit of Gideon, in Peter, doing the same thing: "To whom coming, as unto a Living Stone, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house." Who is that Living Stone? Peter himself? Nay, but Peter's Lord, Jesus. The Lord only will Gideon have to reign over the Lord's people, and Peter is evidently governed by the same spirit. Rome (and all human ecclesiastical pretension), is equally clearly governed by the spirit of Abimelech; she assumes the place of rule, crushing out in blood all opposition to her claims. The picture is very perfect in every detail.

But let us look a little closer at this man's name: Abimelech. It is the generic name for the kings of the Philistines. See Genesis 20,21,26. They are all Abimelechs. It is a *Philistine* name; our Abimelech is a Philistine by nature. We have already seen something of these Philistines, and they will come much more prominently before us later; but we may again profitably remind ourselves that they are mere "wanderers" (as the word means) in the heritage of faith — Egyptians, laying claim to what belongs exclusively to Israel. Very skillful too in stopping up wells (Gen. 26:18), but knowing nothing about opening them; they are indeed perfect pictures of the first man assuming a place — nay, claiming everything — in the things of God, and stopping all blessing by his assumption. And wherever you can discern this ecclesiastical assumption today, this longing for *government,* this love of pre-eminence, my reader; no matter where it is — in Rome or her daughters — in priests or presbyter — names are of small moment now, realities are what we have to do with — *there* is the *Philistine,* and sometimes this is much nearer to us than we have any idea of!

Abimelech begins his claims at the stone that Joshua

erected in Ebal, the mountain where all the curses connected with a broken law were uttered, (cf. Dt. 11:29; 27:4, 12, 13; Josh. 8:30). And the claims of our present-day Abimelech began, and always do begin, exactly at the same place. When professing Christians gave up the hope of their calling, their joyous standing, by simple faith, in a present perfect acceptance with God; and once more took the place of being Jews — they who were not (Rev. 2 and 3) — put themselves again *under the law and its curse,* at a distance from God; then once more a class arose of privileged ones who alone could approach God in the earthly sanctuaries they made for Him; in other words, Abimelech was again crowned "at Ebal." Surely this is simple and clear; and unless this series of coincidences is not in itself miraculous, it is the very Finger of God.

But God never leaves Himself without some witness — there is ever a little Jotham who escapes — a remnant which cleaves to Himself, and which finds its way, through some secret known only to faith, to Gerizim, the mount of blessing. See Dt. 11:29. Jotham means "Jehovah is perfect." Beautiful word! Telling of a testimony — even in the very face of all man's boasted pretension — of the fullness, the all-sufficiency of our Jehovah — Jesus.

But listen to this dear kinsman of ours, as I am sure we may, by the tender grace of God, call him, as he shouts his message from Gerizim, over the intervening valley, to Ebal: he stands alone, "one against all," a very "Antipas," as in the days of Smyrna persecution (Rev. 3:13).

He begins with a parable of the trees seeking a king to reign over them, and they pick upon the most worthy for this high honor. They first offer the scepter to the olive, then to the fig, *then to the vine; but all refuse, each esteeming its present* ministry, for which it is adapted by nature, better than

"waving to and fro" in vain authority over its fellow trees.

What does it mean? What is the truth for our souls in it?

First Jotham strikes at the very root-error of men, as "baalim," "lords." Authority is far inferior to fruitful *service;* nay, in the ways of God is never divorced form it. The olive, fig, and vine refuse with scorn the proffered dignity; they already have a better. No one who knows the joy of service, in absolute dependence on almighty love and power, will ever claim, or assume, the vain and empty honor of a self-exalting authority. Poor Pharisees! What know they of the glory of being nothing, and of serving in self-forgetful delight the people of God. Nay, nay; *they* must climb high, and sit themselves down even on Moses' seat. So be it; but it is a very dangerous place — that Moses' seat — apt at any moment to get on fire as Jotham shows; but still very popular with the first man.

Let us look a little closer at these three trees Jotham chose to represent the blessed spirit of ministry. First the "Olive." This is the tree of *testimony.* Its fruit provided the only light of the holy place (Ex. 27:20). It beautifully figures God's testimony on earth, which amid all the surrounding darkness of error, burns as a bright light of truth. Israel of old was so set. She was to be God's witness: God's olive tree. Alas, what a testimony she gave, even putting out the Light of the World, and she is set aside temporarily, whilst the Gentile takes her place in testimony. Now hear how our apostle speaks to us Gentiles: "For if thou (i.e., the Gentile) were cut out of the olive tree that is wild by nature, and were graffed contrary to nature, into a good olive tree, how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive tree?" The Gentile only tells the same sad story as the Jew: wise in his own conceit, he has left his boast in the goodness

of God, and boasting in himself, he too shall be "cut off." One, and one only, is the true good Olive, whose fatness indeed honors God and man, and only as abiding in Him, and receiving a constant supply of life from Him, can you, or I, or any, give any true light in this dark scene, "honoring God and man" by testifying to the truth as to each, in full view of all the false boasting of today. But, oh, if we, by grace, do rejoice in Him, and shine in our feeble way, letting Christ Jesus alone be seen, and not our vain silly selves, we too shall not want to do any *ruling,* but be quite content with thus *serving.*

The Fig is the tree of food — sustenance. When our Lord was an hungered he sought to get something to satisfy that hunger from a fig tree. It was barren. Again an apt illustration of what Israel was, of what you and I are, dear reader, in the flesh. We never did, never will, never can give God one grain of true satisfaction. But Jesus is the true Fig tree. He is the true Food of God. On Him God feeds, and man also. Well did Jotham's fig say: "Shall I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?" So, if you abide in Him, shall *you* too become as a good fig tree, and you won't want to lord it over any.

The Vine is the wine-giving tree: the "wine that makes glad the heart of man" (Ps. 104), and is clearly and beautifully a figure of man *as God intended him.* He was peculiarly to give joy to his God, and, like "a wise" son, to make Him glad. But God surely derived no gladness from Adam, or any of his race. He brought Israel, a vine, out of Egypt, He planted it in a goodly land (Ps. 80) and then "looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." So it ever was till One came who could say "I am the true Vine;" and, once and again, we may reverently see God gathering grapes, as it were, from this lovely Vine in these words of joyful

appreciation, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Here is true fruit from a man at last. Here is One who "cheereth God and man;" and, abiding in Him, again, may even you and I bear much of the same fruit — or will you prefer "ruling?"

Three beautiful trees are these: the olive, the vine, the fig; and, I judge, that together, and in this order, they express man perfectly in every part of his composite being: spirit, soul, and body in the Lord Jesus, wholly sanctified — (1 Th. 5) — to that service which is perfect freedom.

But what of the bramble? We may safely say that God never intended a bramble as a part of this original creation at all. It came in with the sin of the head of that creation. Then, poor man, away from God — self-centered — fruitless — brought forth only that which hurt whatever touched him; and lo, the bramble was there; sadly, but perfectly expressing him. And it is this wretched useless thing that will "lord" it over the trees; and we may remember, with profit, that not one of us is by any means without the "bramble" nature still — watch!

But is there no divinely authorized "rule" among God's people today? Do we not read "Obey them that have the rule over you" (Heb. 13). Most surely there is rule; but it is the rule of love and nothing else. Love that seeks no authority, no exaltation; love that recognizes the greatest place in him that serves and that ever, in some way, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, addicts itself "to the service of the saints." Love, whom I find, not above my head , but at my feet — here may Christians find their rulers still, and may freely, in responsive affection, submit themselves unto such, and to everyone who is a co-helper and true laborer (1 Cor. 16:15,16).

Jotham applies his parable. My father served you, ventured his life for you, delivered you; ye have slain his sons, and made one who has done nothing for you, king; his rule will be the rule of the bramble, it must result in the mutual destruction of him and you.

So it came to pass. Three years, and the true condition of things is evident. There is no real unity between the lords of Shechem and Abimelech. Gaal, the son of Ebed, leads an insurrection against him and there is war. But if ever a man had a significant name it is this Gaal. It means "loathing" or "hatred;" whilst "Ebed" is slavery. The loathing born of slavery — the natural revulsion of man from the dominance of ecclesiastical tyranny. It is still the *flesh* opposing *flesh*. And if we may see in Abimelech that religious pretension that finds its full expression in Rome (the Jezebel that is so prominent in the letter to Thyatira. Rev. 2), we may discern that natural rebellion to her tyranny which was equally evident in one aspect of the Reformation. Not all stood as Luther, independent of the arm of flesh, in simple confidence in God. Political alliances were made, armies were set in motion, and for thirty years Europe was deluged in blood. It was flesh against flesh. The hatred (Gaal) born of a long period of oppression (Ebed) seeking to overthrow the ecclesiastical oppressor (Abimelech).

If our narrative may be looked at as at all prophetical, the struggle, although at first meeting with some success, is in vain. Abimelech and his officer Zebul (is not that strangely like "Jezebel," cf. Rev. 2:20, and does it not tend to confirm all our interpretations) get the best of the conflict. Gaal (hatred) is eventually overcome, and do we not see him dying, as it were, everywhere today. Rome is again gaining. It is a symptom of bigotry now to *hate* her ways — of an enlightened liberalism to tolerate her soul-destroying

wickedness. Yes, the tide has turned, and every Protestant sect that at one time turned its back on her with "loathing" are turning towards her again, with more or less complacency. What else means this increasing tendency to form, and ritual, and liturgy; this replacing of simple singing of praise, by choirs and beautiful music, this ever-growing imitation of Romish ecclesiasticism in ornate architecture; this ever-growing power of the "clergy"? — Gaal is dying.

So shall it be; so does the word of prophecy proclaim clearly; at last there is to be but one expression of the first man's religion, and that one a woman, "Babylon, the mother of harlots." But even this is but for a time; the solemn word shall be chanted "Babylon is fallen, is fallen," and, as the millstone that crushed Abimelech, *so* shall that great city be cast down and "be found no more at all" (Rev. 18).

Thus ends the rule of man of man, in mutual destruction. Perhaps you say, my reader, "I have no direct personal interest in that. I am far removed from reigning or ruling." No, no; you are not Abimelech, nor answer to him; but note it well that the same trouble was there on all sides. If Abimelech wanted to rule, surely exactly the same spirit was in those who are so significantly called "lords;" they too wanted to be uppermost. And have you never read of two dear disciples who wanted the highest place, to sit the one on the right hand and the other on the left of the King; but were they worse than the ten others who contended with them, because *they* wanted it too? Or have you never read of Christian assemblies warned against this very thing? "If ye (as the bramble) bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." Is there none of this today? It is rampant on every side. Then hear the Spirit of Christ wooing us to the other path of the olive, the fig, the vine, in the sweet and holy words, "By love serve one

another."

It is hard to tear myself away from what one feels is so deeply needed; but one word as to Jotham. Where is he amid all this conflict? At Beer. Oh happy dwelling place of faith ever. By the springing *"well"* of never-failing love, where exhaustless supplies of life-giving waters flow free and unchecked. There dwelt Jotham, and there dwells the lowly spirit of faith that knows something of the all-sufficiency of Christ today. Oh, to pitch our tents too by "Beer" — "the Well."

## Chapter 10

# TOLA AND JAIR

We get here a unique thing in the book of Judges: two judges, or defenders of Israel, following each other with no captivity, or even any trouble or evil coming between and separating them from each other. We shall gather the significance of this later.

The stormy reign of Abimelech is over, and now we come in every way to the happy contrast with it. Abimelech's reign was short, but it made a great deal of "history." Its few years take up a long chapter of fifty-seven verses whilst the record of the next forty-five years is embraced in five short verses. As has often been said: "Happy is the people that has no history," for history is indeed little more than "a record of the sins, the sorrows, the sufferings of mankind."

But what can we possibly learn from these first verses of chapter 10? They read:

"And after Abimelech there arose, to defend Israel, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir, in Mount Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir."

Now here is really little more than a string of names, and, if they have no significance, it is difficult to see how this little narrative can possibly have any practical meaning for us. Why should I be interested in learning that Tola was "the son

of Puah," or that he was "buried in Shamir"? But suppose we translate these names into our own language, and then see if there is not something in them for our profit. Tola is "after Abimelech," the man who would exalt himself to the highest place. And what does "Tola" mean? It is "a worm." Surely, then, instantaneously a beam of light breaks in upon us. The lofty one is here replaced by the "worm"! Then Tola is the lowly spirit of self-abasement and self-effacement that is ever Israel's savior, if Israel only knew it. "I am a worm — a Tola — and no man," is the cry of the Blessed One who voluntarily came into the place of extreme humiliation. For that this is the idea divinely intended to be conveyed to us is clear. So Bildad expostulates with Job: "Behold, even to the moon and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in His sight: how much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm (tola)?" But whence has this lowly spirit sprung? What has produced it? He is the son of Puah, who is the son of Dodo. It springs first from "*Dodo*," which is, when interpreted, "Belonging to love" or "His beloved." The son of Dodo is "Puah": an "utterance." So the genealogy reads thus: The realization of divine love produces "utterance." "I believed, therefore have I *spoken*;" but *speech* is not the end of such a line: corresponding conduct follows, in lowly hiding and self-abasement, and *this* "saves Israel." Of course it does; and although three thousand years or more have rolled their weary course since then, it is still true that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Tola ever saves Israel. We cannot make too much of Tola, dear reader.

Surely, too, Tola speaks of that holy and blessed Spirit that ever governed the One adorable precious Deliverer of His people. What a contrast to Abimelech, who fully represents the first man and his devil-instilled spirit of self-exaltation, did the Lord Jesus ever show, and it is our safety, blessing, and enjoyment to consider well, and pattern after the mind

that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2).

But Tola passes away; yet, if it is not stretching the meaning of words unduly, in a sense, he remains. He has lived at "Shamir" — a word that often occurs in the Scriptures, and is variously translated "briars" (Isa. 5:6), a "diamond" (Jer. 17:1), "adamant" (Zech. 7:12); but the reader will discern one underlying thought beneath all these meanings: firmness, hardness, *unchangeableness*. Well, here the self-humbled one has lived with God alone for his strength, and here he is buried; as if, in quiet confidence, he would leave his beloved Israel to the unchanging care of Him who remains ever.

The suggestion — for it is only a suggestion, for which I am indebted to another — is to a certain extent confirmed by the phenomenon, already noticed, of two judges being united together, with no intervening declension on the part of Israel.

"And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass' colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havoth-Jair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died and was buried in Camon."

The word "Jair" has the clear, unmistakable meaning of "Enlightener." How beautifully this connects with Tola, and, as it were, completes the picture of Him who, after coming as Tola, "the worm and no man," shall arise as the "Sun of Righteousness," with healing in "His wings," and bring in the true *Day* — the "Enlightener."

Thus far in its long sad history the world has seen nothing but the reign of "the bramble." But "*after this*" — and now we see that the word "after" is significant — after this is past, after it has run out its full time of trial, then comes the "Tola-Jair" reign of the second Man, a time of peace such as this

world has never seen, "as heaven looks down to see."

Very little are we told of "Jair." He is a Gileadite, i.e., a "witness," and he is finally buried in Camon.

Now, this word bears clearly in it the idea of "*Resurrection*," "life out of death." It is true that Jair must fall asleep; but even in his grave, in Camon, shall he speak of Him whom the grave could not hold, but who ever reigns after "the power of an endless life."

But we have a strange addition as to the thirty sons of Jair, who rode on thirty ass' colts, and had thirty cities.

What can be the reason for including such points as these in a divine revelation from God to men? If there be nothing beneath the surface — nothing but the bare fact — it would seem little less, or other, than mockery to tell us that the sons of one of Israel's judges rode on ass' colts! But let other Scriptures throw their light on this, and even these words may afford a "sanctifying light" that shall fully justify their insertion.

Now, Jair is, as we have seen, the "Enlightener," He who, in a day yet to come, shall throw His holy beams over this dark earth as the King who reigns in righteousness. First over Jerusalem that holy light falls, when this word shall be fulfilled: "Rise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isa. 60). But then shall not His people share that glory? Certainly they shall; and here, in these children of Jair, we have His own people associated with Him, and sharing that glory. Not in the day of battle, mark — not riding on the *white horse*, the symbol of victorious battle (as Rev. 19) — but in the subsequent peaceful reign that follows the repression of evil.

It was on "a colt *the foal of an ass*" that the King came

riding into Jerusalem in the day of her opportunity. Alas, *Jerusalem knew not her day! He was rejected; but His dignity* and His peaceful errand were told out by the creature He rode. Being thus rejected, we see Him next in another, and a more martial glory: on a "white horse," on which He comes "to judge and make war." But this, "His strange work," being over, He will once more exchange the white horse for the ass' colt, and this we see here, when His people who have been "faithful over a few things," in the day of His absence, now have corresponding rule over cities. The number "30" confirms this: 10 x 3, the day when the results of faithfulness *in responsibility* (10) are fully manifested (3).

Thus Tola and Jair form one united figure of Him who shall, in due time, replace the reign of the thorn-bush: in humiliation and glory. "The worm" and "the sun," the sufferings and the glory connected, as they always are, in the Son of Man, His people having no part in those *atoning* sufferings (so there are no sons of Tola), but associated with Him in "the glory that shall follow."

Now, is there not a beauty in the whole narrative? First, "that which is natural," in the proud self-exaltation of Abimelech: then, "after that," a Ruler for whom we still wait, but in whose "kingdom and patience" we, through grace abounding, have our place. May we walk worthy "in all lowliness and meekness."

## JEPHTHAH

Lower than ever Israel now falls; as, for the sixth time, the Spirit of God gives the mournful record, "and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord;" for now there is a kind of *abandon* to evil on all sides. "They served Baalim and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and

the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistine;" a seven-fold, or complete, abandonment to idolatry on all sides; beginning with those gods — Baalim and Ashtaroth — that speak of violence and corruption, as giving character to all the rest. Jehovah alone is forgotten. He is given up; and is it not, therefore, righteous that He should give them up? They serve their false gods before He gives them up to learn, by bitter experience, just what this service is, as in contrast with his own easy yoke and light burden.

The Lord sells them again to the Philistines and to the Ammonites, that is, *West* and *East*, but the servitude to the Ammonites is now only detailed.

At the risk of being tedious through repetition, I must remind my readers that we have something more than a mere academic interest in these things. We are looking upon pictures of what is actually now going on in the unseen sphere, and we know who has said, "the things, not seen, are *eternal*," and "on us the ends of the ages have come," that is, that all that we see in this book of Judges is but a shadow, the substance of which is now occurring with us. We have hitherto endeavored to discern who, or what, is pictured to us by the various nations that have brought Israel to bondage. We must now ask where shall we find that which answers today to "the Ammonites?"

Let me, too, again repeat, that we must not apply these terms *directly* to any *men* now. The "*seen*" of that day figures, not the seen, but "the unseen," of this; the material figures the spiritual. "*Men*" then figure spiritual principles that now govern or dominate the Lord's professed people for good or evil, as then men or nations did of old. What principle then is figured by the Ammonite?

Let us gather all that the Scriptures tell us of them. First, as to their source, they are the progeny of incest, children of Lot and his youngest daughter. They have a *kind* of connection with faith, and its profession, but it is spurious, for they were "bastards and not sons." Their land lay east of the Jordan; that is, as we may say, on the *world-side* of the cross of Christ. They figure that which does not enter into the full true meaning of that cross. Let us note, too, their peculiar contrast, as well as connection with the Philistine. As the Philistine was the threatening foe on the one side, the Ammonite was on the other; and we have already seen enough of the Philistine to discern in him a type, or figure, of the spirit of ritualistic formalism or sacerdotalism of this age with its claims to authority based on succession. Then may not the Ammonite figure the opposite evil principle of "*rationalism*," with its proud claims of independence of all divine authority? The Philistine may well speak to us of that spirit of ritualism, which, beginning very early, goes on — as does the evil ecclesiastical principle in Thyatire (Rev. 2) — to the end, whilst the Ammonite may equally well speak to us of the spirit of independency and rationalism, seen in Laodicea, that also characterizes our day, and assures us that this "day" *is* the end! The possessions of faith — our own land — lie between these two; between the two foes, Philistine and Ammonite, that is, between ritualism on the one hand and rationalism on the other.

The Ammonite, then (or the rationalism which he figures), settles down in things seen — where else should he settle? This world is good enough for him. He is rather proud to confess that he is an agnostic; and as such knows nothing of what lies across those waters of Jordan that border his land and limit his ken; or if he ever crosses that river, it is but to distress Israel; it is but to make an attack on faith, and to boast in being rich in that which he can never make truly his own. It is

the materialistic rationalism of our day.

Here, then, do we get the oppression that the Lord's people suffer from the dominance of the unsanctified carnal reason that would undermine the foundation of faith; rob us of the Scriptures as being any real revelation from God; bring down everything to the level of man's depraved reason, reject all that is above it. Thus, let us give up submission to God, and worship the god of the Ammonite, "Moloch," and we soon feel the galling of the yoke. But this compels us to ask: Who is this false god "Moloch?" The word means "*The King*." I judge, then, it speaks of the *enthronement*, the *deification* of *reason*. Not true reason enlightened by the Word of God, kept in her true place of dependence, but exalted to *the throne*, and quite independent of that holy source of all true light, and, indeed, rejecting it.

Oh, my dear brother, is not the Ammonite rampant in this our day? What is the spirit that is dominating Protestant Europe and America but largely Ammonite? What is the carnal "higher criticism" that lays hostile hands on, and dissects God's Word, but *Ammonite*? Unitarianism in all its forms and phases, what is it but *Ammonite*? Nay, further, when was there ever such a day, in which the denial of the very foundation truths of our faith, was combined with the most impudent claim to be alone the rightful defenders of that faith, as the present? Hearken to the so-called "Christadelphian"; and one would certainly think that he alone owned and had a perfect monopoly of the truth of God. Yet he rejects the atonement, the divinity of our Lord, the personality of the Holy Spirit, and many other fundamentals. It is a raid of the *Ammonite*.

When one hears the kind of teaching and preaching now current, even in so-called orthodox churches, one can only marvel at the perfection of the picture that has foreshadowed

this in the raids of the Ammonite into Israel's land. The atonement and justification alone by that precious blood is denied with bold insistence in Protestant pulpits. God is politely bowed out of His own universe, and spared the trouble of having created it — a mysterious evolution, demanding far greater credulity, taking His place.

For the Ammonite does not figure plain outspoken Infidelity; but Infidelity with, very possibly, a "Rev." before his name, a D.D. after it, and robed in the garb of ecclesiastical dignity. Infidelity claiming as his own the possessions of faith, claiming to *be* Christian, claiming the testimony, thus camping at "Gilead," the heap of witness. In this spirit let us recognize the *Ammonite* of today.

Ah! how many of the Lord's people are in bondage to it!

Is, then, reason an enemy of faith? Must we, in order to be *believers*, outrage the reason that alone distinguishes men from the brute? Must we, for example, *see* bread, *feel* bread, *smell* bread, *taste* bread; but deny every sense, and "believe" that it is not bread at all, but God? Is this "Faith?" Oh, away with such wicked "Philistine" folly, and boldly let us claim that, far from Faith's professions belonging to the Ammonite, the land of the Ammonite belongs to Faith; in other words, that Faith is alone consistent with the highest, purest, truest reason. God never says one word that is *contrary* to reason; much, indeed, that is *above* it, or it would not be reasonable. If I could fully fathom God by my reason, then is God only on my own level; and this means not God at all. The Ammonite then is that carnal, debased, irrational rationalism that shuts out God and, with Him, all true intelligence, all light and love.

It is a hard bondage, and whilst the first man may not feel it, the new man soon begins to groan under the inroads of the

Ammonite, "against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim;" and well he may, for this means that he is being robbed of *Praise* (Judah), and *Power* (Benjamin), and *Fruitfulness* (Ephraim), till he is sore distressed.

Surely the picture is true to life. When did you ever know a saint running over with joy and praise when the Ammonite, or Rationalism, was making inroads on his faith?

When did such ever show any spiritual *power*, or abound in *fruitfulness*? Never. He is praiseless, powerless, fruitless. Have *you* never known such? Has it never touched *you*, dear reader?

Israel appeals to Jehovah, who, this time, hesitates, as it were, in the deliverance. He Himself does some "reasoning" with His people — "Ye have forsaken Me, served other gods — let *them* deliver you in the time of your tribulation." Surely that is "reasonable." Jehovah meets them on the ground they have chosen.

But whilst the Ammonite is an adept at *robbing*, he is a very poor "*giver*." He will take away, but never replace. He will rob you of all your consolations amid the storms and disappointments of life; but give you nothing to make up for it. He will rob you of what has sustained you in many a time of affliction, but leave you to face them in the future all alone. And at the tomb, where Faith, with tender, gentle, sympathetic hand, takes away all the bitterness from tears, he himself must sorrow absolutely "without hope" (1 Th. 4). There is no deliverance in the Ammonite's god, Moloch; in reason exalted to the throne, independent of revelation; that is, independent of *God* — and this, my beloved, is the "independency" that we do really need to fear.

But Jehovah's heart is *grieved* for His people. Though He

says "Go," yet when they put away the strange gods, and confess their sin, He begins to move for them, only not in the open, active way as of old; they are on a lower plane, and there never can be an exact repetition of the past. Just as it is today, we need deliverance again, but we must not expect a repetition of the past, let not the eye look backward, but ever upward — "wait only upon *God*."

The children of Israel now gather together at "Mizpah" — "the *watchtower*." It is the place at which deliverance must begin. They are *awake*; no longer oblivious or indifferent to danger, but fully recognizing it and opposing it. This is the first thing in this deliverance.

But who shall lead them? They need some leader. So saints of this day need, not merely a human leader, there are too many such; but some strong *principle* that shall lead and govern them in their conflict with the present-day Ammonite. They shall find this where Israel found it then, in *Jephthah*.

## Chapter 11

# JEPHTHAH (continued)

Who is this Jephthah? He is a "Gileadite." A true "witness," a native of the land that that stranger Ammonite, is claiming. But what light does his name afford us?

Jephthah is derived from Pahthah, "*to open*," which is the word used in Isaiah 50:5: "The Lord hath *opened* my ear," and, again, Psalm 51:15: "*Open* Thou my lips." Jephthah then means, "The Opener"; "He who opens."

But does this help us? Why is "one who opens" just the leader needed against the Ammonite? Has the Ammonite, like the Philistine, *closed up* some fountain of blessing? Indeed, he has. Under his hand the blessed living Word of God has become a dead, silent, closed book. Jephthah is "He who opens" it once more, and this is exactly what is needed to throw the hosts of rationalism into confusion. Let the Word of God be opened by one who is a true witness (Gileadite) — its true, spiritual meaning opened up, applied and enforced — and even "Rev. Infidelity, D. D.," is confounded.

But here is a strange thing; this Jephthah is not a true-born child. He is the son of a harlot! In fact, this is the basis for his having been rejected, and cast out by his brethren. What an unlikely instrument against the base-born children of Ammon! It is true, he is indeed a most unlikely instrument. But things are getting ever lower in Israel, and Jephthah's birth points at least to this fact. The Lord has to bring down

His people by selecting an instrument with the humbling brand of his birth upon him; and who has been rejected because of this. Here is the fitting leader against the proud Ammonite. By such "foolish things" He brings down the wise; by such "base things," the proud. It is the stigma attached to faith.

Follow Jephthah further. A fugitive from his father's house, he finds refuge in the land of "Tob," that is, by interpretation, "goodness" — a land of goodness. Does not this help us a little further? Do we not begin to see in Jephthah that spirit of lowly faith, which, in time of sorrow, turns to the Lord, and finds in that turning alone, cut off from his brethren, making the Lord his confidant (v. 11), a "land of *goodness*." It is a good place for faith to grow, a good training-ground for a deliverer, as Moses found long before, as David long after this.

To Jephthah, too, as to David, assemble a lot of very shady characters: "vain men," as they are called, who give no glory to their leader, except as the very association with him changes them altogether, and makes "mighty men" out of them, who had come "in distress," "in debt" or "bitter of soul." If our interpretation of Jephthah (as that spirit of lowly faith that opens God's Word to the heart, and the heart to the truth of God's Word) be correct, then it is certainly true enough that "vain persons" coming to this, are no longer "vain," but "mighty." Yea, thus does God stain the pride of all human glory, "that he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

There is much, too, to connect Jephthah, not only with faith as a principle, but with the Object of Faith, the Lord Jesus. For mark the Lord's people, Israel, have to own the Rejected One, before deliverance; i.e., they have to *own Him as their Head, whom they have rejected on account of His*

*lowly birth*. Is not this, in some sort, a figure of far greater things, as "Is not this the Carpenter, the Son of Joseph?"

But we must not divert the lesson in any measure from ourselves. You will remember that when Paul went to Corinth he laid out a certain course for himself. "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified!" He was coming to a city noted for its intellectuality, and does he, therefore, come prepared to lead these highly intelligent people, first to Christ and then into all the deep and precious things of God? Not at all. This he cannot do. He can only give them the simplest Christian truth, "Jesus Christ and *Him* crucified." This is often quoted in a mistaken way, as if it embodied the whole scope of Christian truth; but far from this, it is but the "*milk*," as in contrast with the "*meat*" of the Word, as the context clearly proves. "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." This very pride of intellect hindered their true intelligence, they were in danger of Ammonite supremacy from which only the simplest, but most searching, and humbling truth, could deliver them. Yes, they must come to the rejected, despised Jephthah to lead them.

We must defer considering the deliverance itself, and what follows it, to another chapter, if the Lord will.

## Chapter 12

# JEPHTHAH (continued)

Jephthah, thus established as the leader of the people, prepares for the coming conflict by a parley, a feature quite distinct from anything that has gone before. No other leader reasoned with the enemy; but it is in keeping with this deliverance. Jephthah will meet the Ammonite on his own ground, as it were; nor does the Spirit of God ever shrink from discussion with the conceited Rationalism of our day.

It is always characteristic of what is termed "Free Thought," that it assumes that no one else ever *did*, or apparently *could*, think; it alone has a complete monopoly of thought. All else is in bondage to a blind, dark, ignorant traditionalism. Nor does the spirit of error, of whatever character, hesitate to cast the obloquy of this term "tradition" on the truth it opposes. Just now violent and direct attacks are being made on many a fundamental truth, and all those who still maintain these truths must endure the sneer of subjection to "tradition." Nor does the enemy lack his accustomed subtlety in this. We have been compelled to give up so many things that, at one time, we supposed to be sure, but which we have found to have no basis, except in tradition, that we are really predisposed to let go everything to which this objectionable word is attached. Just call anything "tradition" and you have gone far in shaking its hold on us.

Thus the doctrine that the human spirit is immortal by its divine birth is "tradition"; but, that man is only a brute is the "free thinker's" noble and morally elevated discovery. That the death of the believer is a departing to be with Christ and is far better, is "tradition"; that it is a state of absolute unconsciousness is the free thinker's contribution to our comfort. That there is a second death, the "Lake of Fire," an endless woe to the finally impenitent, is "tradition"; whilst the free thinker consoles the rejector of God's gospel with the assurance that nothing worse awaits him than the same annihilation that befalls the beasts. We must face these Ammonite claims fairly and fearlessly, and as Jephthah did, simply test them all by the written Word.

This then brings us back to our narrative, the Ammonite is quite ready to state his case: "Israel took away my land when they came out of Egypt, from Arnon to Jabbok, and unto Jordan; now therefore restore those lands peaceably." It *sounds* very reasonable indeed, as most things that Ammonites say do *sound*.

Jephthah's answer to it is most interesting — will my readers turn to it in their Bibles, and they will see it is simply a testing of the Ammonite's claim by the whole Scripture that bears upon the matter. Jephthah goes over the narrative of Israel's doings in connection with the nations they come in contact with, until they come to the land within the boundaries specified, between Arnon and Jabbok, and here they find, not the Ammonite at all, but the *Amorite*. The Ammonite had already lost his land, even at that time, and lost it to the Amorite.

But who then is this mighty Amorite? His name must help us to the answer. It means "The Speaker," or "The Talker." Now speech is the distinguishing characteristic of man in contrast with the brute creation. It is a faculty connected with

that spirit that alone separates man from the beast, and is the mark of intelligence. This, in direct opposition to God, is the Amorite — in one word, open "Infidelity."

Now the Ammonite has a kind of relationship with faith — spurious, it is true, but still he is a child of Lot — poor worldly, yet righteous Lot. That is, as we have interpreted, worldly Christianity naturally produces a rationalistic spirit, and Rationalism claims a dwelling place within the borders of Faith, although on the world side of the Cross of Christ, and as long as *she retains her place*, the claim is allowed. But not so for the Amorite; no such claim has he.

For, says this Jephthah, this "Opener" of the Scriptures, "You Ammonites could not keep your land when you had it. Israel did not take it away from you. You had lost it already to the Amorite, that open denier of divine Truth, who made no pretence to any relationship with Faith."

So it was; so it is; so it ever will be. The spirit of rationalism always, sooner or later, loses her place, and gives way to Infidelity, whilst still claiming the domain of reason as peculiarly her own. Faith, on the other hand, claims the same domain, as in full harmony with God, and the conflict must be fought out.

Thus we interpret Jephthah's answer, "Faith found the intelligence, or sphere of the spirit, not in possession of mere Rationalism, but of avowed Infidelity, and recovered it by power; shall it now give up what it has acquired by its divinely given energy? Shall it be untrue to the Lord who has put the sphere of reason within its borders? Shall Faith surrender its divinely acquired inheritance to rationalistic claimants, who were themselves unable to keep it from Infidelity? Aye, in spite of all your brave professions and claims — in spite of your Rev. and learned prefixes and pretentious affixes — you

self-styled Rationalists are but *servants* to Infidelity. Further reason, true reason, has been found in perfect harmony with true faith so long (300 years) as to give a fair title altogether."

We are told nothing of the details of the conflict that follows, a silence that has its beauty. The Ammonite is already beaten, even before actual conflict has begun. The victory has been obtained by the Scripture alone.

But we can but note the marks of inferiority in this deliverance to its predecessors in the frailty of Jephthah. He bargains with Jehovah. "If thou wilt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." It was this caused the only jarring note amid all joyous songs of victory that day. Harken to poor Jephthah when his daughter meets him with timbrels and dances, "Alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me." "No, no, Jephthah, thy daughter has not troubled thee; thou are putting the blame in the wrong place; the trouble has come from thyself alone, and none else is to blame." It is even to this day quite the usual thing in such cases to put the cause of trouble in the wrong place; it is never ourselves, but those whom we cut off that cause our trouble — such "troublesome" ones may still be discovered.

We will not discuss the question of a bloody sacrifice of this dear child; it is probably wiser to draw our lessons from the dark cloud undeniably resting over the scene. It is quite true that Jephthah had proved himself well acquainted with the Scripture, and therefore knew that the Lord had provided for the redemption of any child of man from the consequences of

a vow (Lev. 27). But on the other hand, if Jephthah had followed this, and redeemed his daughter with ten shekels of silver (v. 25), what further claim at all had the vow? Was she not perfectly free? Why all this mourning? There is at least a dark shadow designedly left over the scene, and Jephthah, in spirit, was quite ready, in his self-imposed zeal for the Lord, to slay anything that met him; the dearer the object, the more reason for watching against natural weakness, and the more precious the sacrifice to Jehovah.

Such history has repeated itself, and even this very day the conqueror of the Ammonite, the spirit that has "opened" God's Word for God's people in a way that has delivered them from their enemies, is the very spirit that would slay the dearest; and the closer and dearer the sacrifice the more it adds to its morbid complacency, since it evidences the more extreme faithfulness and zeal.

For whatever question there may be as to the real fate of his daughter, there is none whatever as to that of his brethren, the Ephraimites.

These true, but foolish children of Israel begin to deal with Jephthah as they had with Gideon. But they find quite another spirit here. Instead of a gentle Gideon, who, by a soft answer, turns away wrath, Jephthah does not hesitate a moment in turning his victorious sword against his brethren, and seizing the fords of Jordan, he puts to death 42,000 of them!

This is certainly a strange place to slay his brethren. The fords of Jordan is the one spot which, we may say, alone *united them*; for here alone could Jordan, the river of death, be safely crossed and Gileadite and Ephraimite, be as one. Surely these fords speak very clearly of that other Death, by which He who had the power of death has been brought to

nothing (Heb. 2). It is the death of our Lord Jesus Christ that alone permits passage of Jordan, and it is here, the proper death-place, indeed, of lusty Moab (ch. 3:28, 29), of all that is of the world or of the flesh; but the one precious uniting place of all that is of God; it is just here that Jephthah cuts off his brethren!

Alas, all too easy is this of interpretation; it is where the death of Christ is shown forth that the cutting off of brethren has been effected even to this day. Everywhere else, except at that hallowed spot that speaks of that Death which should unite most closely — everywhere else there may be some degree of oneness manifested; in service, in prayer, in reading; but here, even where their unity should be peculiarly expressed (1 Cor. 10:17), is the cutting off place!

Nor is it necessary to define the various shibboleths that serve to evidence those not of our "church," our "denomination," our "circle," "of us." If one does not share convictions on a hundred questions as to which intelligence differs — if he cannot "frame to pronounce" as to these exactly as we do, then must he too be cut off at the fords of Jordan.

May we not surely say of both that far off event and of this, its too faithful antitype today: Oh, shameful end of what began so fair! Oh, scene to make us weep, when no longer clearly recognized Moabite, but Israelite from whom our difference is difficult to discern, suffers at the fords of Jordan. Moab may rejoice now, Ammon may be comforted, and all the enemies of Christ may mock, for our shame is published abroad and cannot be hid!

I cannot refrain from quoting here from another:

"How sad it is when we think that those who sometimes are

most faithful in overthrowing heresy often fail to discriminate between the overthrow of the real heretic, and the destruction of that which is nearest and dearest. It is a matter of history, and a matter of experience, that unflinching firmness with the enemy oftentimes is followed by equally unflinching firmness in the same degree with our brethren. Is it not true, beloved, that Jephthah's offering up the daughter of his bosom is followed by the slaughter of his brethren? Is it not true that the man, apparently, reduced everything to a dead level? * * * Ah, brethren, need I interpret that for us? Need I speak of that spirit which, alas, we have seen so much of, which makes no discrimination; which as the apostle Jude says, does not make a difference of some, saving them with fear? Have we not seen something of treating foe and friend alike? Have we not seen too much of that, of *treating the people of God just exactly as we would treat the enemies of God?*"

* * * * * *

"I can deal with Ephraim, as I surely should, but it is quite another thing for me to take the fords of Jordan, and compel everyone that goes through those fords to say just thus and so. To compel him to say Shibboleth, and if he cannot say it quite, to cut him off. Shibboleth is 'the flood,' you know, that which divides. It refers to that which divided Gilead from Ephraim. So if those of Ephraim cannot quite pronounce as to what divides, to treat them simply to the sword, that surely is faithfulness gone mad; it ceases to be faithfulness, and comes to be destruction. And I think, dear brethren, that just as we had in Abimelech the failure of man's rule when he is seeking his own aggrandizement, so in Jephthah we have the like failure of man's rule when the conscience is under the power of legalism."

* * * * * *

"I get that thought of Jephthah that he seemed to think that God wanted him to do what it was unpleasant for him to do, simply because it was unpleasant." * * *

"We must beware of just this morbid conscientiousness which is really an undelivered soul in the bonds of legalism, which is going to crowd upon people of God that which is not His test, that which, after all, simply divides the people of God from themselves and does not divide them from their enemies."*

How very true this is. Every test that divides the people of God from one another, and not from their enemies, is another false shibboleth. It is the very spirit that has again utterly marked a work that began as fair with God as did that of Jephthah.

Very specious, too, are the arguments that are used in the particular case in which *we* are the cutters-off. We can quite easily see the folly of it when the sword is directed against us; but it is quite another thing when it is in our hands, when all the power of the regular order is with us. Then "Faithfulness to the Lord," "Fidelity to Truth," "Conscience," "The maintenance of godly order," vague "Principles," and many another "good word and fair speech" (Rom. 16:18) lead to the painful necessity of cutting off brethren, yea even if Ephraimites (i.e., Fruitful ones), since they lack not altogether evidences of the fruit of the Spirit.

What can we do — what should we do in view of the passing away of "brotherly love" and the prevalence of "brotherly strife" on all sides?

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*"Lectures on Judges." By S. Ridout.

First, my beloved reader, see to it that you are not *indifferent* or *apathetic* as to it. Can you imagine Israelites calmly looking on at this scene at the fords without being deeply affected? If such were the case could anything speak more loudly of their own low condition? But are we not in just this danger of regarding the prevailing sorrowful and shameful state of affairs either with complacent indifference or with a kind of despairing apathy? *We* cannot help it, and it gradually loses all effect on conscience or heart.

Next there is the opposite danger of the same spirit of strife governing us. Retaliation is so natural, retribution so just, indignation so righteous that we unconsciously slip into the very guilt we are protesting against. The greatest sectarianism is often found in protest against sects — the worst exclusiveness in that making quite an opposite claim. We may, too, very easily forget that whilst barriers between clearly evidenced saints are surely not of God, yet there are divinely ordered barriers against clearly evidenced wickedness of whatever character. Always with prior self-judgment must the wicked person be put away from any gathered to His holy name.

What can we do but bow our heads and weep with self-judgment, fully identifying ourselves with the sin of it all before our God? Aye, find our way again and again to Bochim (weeping), for still the Lord is there. Yes, even to the end He cares for the broken and contrite heart, and puts His own "mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done" (Ezek. 9).

I almost fear to continue lest these solemn lessons should be in any measure obliterated from our minds; but there is, God be thanked, a sequence that completes this section of Jephthah's judging; and we must glance at it.

Will my reader turn to Judges 12:7 to 15, and he will again find a string of names of three judges, their dwelling and burial places.

Let him turn, too, to chapter 10:1 to 5, and he can hardly fail to note the correspondence between the two sections. There, at the end of Abimelech's reign, we saw, in Tola and Jair, the Lord Jesus Christ making right the evil caused by the first man, so here again we must surely discern the same Blessed One in Ibzan of Bethlehem; the Glorious One of Bethlehem ("Ibzan is 'splendor,' from the root Ahbaz, to shine"). Who can mistake Him? The Restorer of all breaches, "The Faithful and True"; the One who there offsets the Philistine rule of empty ecclesiastical formalism as in Abimelech, and here the failure of man's rule, even when really in men of faith, but under the power of a morbid conscience which cuts off brethren as Jephthah. Yea, none but Ibzan of Bethlehem, the "Holy" One, the Glorious One — Christ in resurrection glory can put matters right now. But he does; breaking down all false barriers, "sending *abroad*," finding his closest relations beyond the narrow walls of a rigid sectarianism; although we may be quite sure that the historical Ibzan made no forbidden marriages with the heathen nations round about, not overthrowing any true barriers. The casting down of false barriers only strengthens the true — emphasizes that distinction which is completely lost by the spirit that levels friend and foe — Ammonite and Ephraimite — "*Antichrists*" (2 John) and "brethren" (3 John). It is the fear of doing this that so often maintains sectarian boundaries.

Then comes Elon of Zebulon, i.e., by interpretation the Strength (Elon) of Communion (Zebulon) and this is in perfect order; but we cannot dwell on it.

Next follows Abdon the son of Hillel; or again simply to

change the Hebrew words into English: "Service" that is born of "Joyful Praise."

All very beautiful, and all speaking of the result of the exaltation of our Lord Jesus. Nor is it without significance, I judge, that this servant (Abdon) is of Ephraim. Aye, poor, humiliated, wounded, cut off Ephraim is once more, through this blessed Restorer, in the place of honor.

Now, too, we get again the peaceful ass' colts, on which the numerous progeny of this fruitful servant ride. No bloodshed now, no retaliation, no counter-raid against Gilead, no battle-cry. No, no, Ibzan has come, and when He, our "Glorious One" shall come, He shall put all in perfect order. A silence shall fall on all party-cries, and only the peaceful fruits of Joyful Praise shall be in evidence.

We are getting very near the end, when we can discern Jephthah.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

## Chapter 13

# SAMSON

We move on now to the last days of the Judges. For the last time we hear the same familiar, sorrowful refrain, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." For the last time, in our book, is there a deliverer raised up. It is the "last time" — these are the "last days."

A solemn pathos ever shadows the "last." It calls to retrospect, to the long path so full of sin, sorrow, and failure — so full of mercy, goodness, long-suffering. It suggests anticipation; what shall bring the end, and when shall that time of crisis come, and what shall follow it? But above all it calls most loudly for earnest heart-searching, self-judgment, and a heart-cry for light on our present path, that at least the time past may suffice for walking our own way; and now, for whatever few hours may be left, we may discern our God's way for us and walk therein, not wasting more opportunities, or losing more of a time that is the more precious, as it is the more limited.

Oh, my reader, my heart stretches out to you, and I would beg you to join in a cry to God for special mercy in our meditation on this last deliverance.

For are not we, too, in the last days? Has not history again repeated itself? Have we not recognized more or less distinctly the various captivities that once in a material way afflicted Israel of old; and have now, in a spiritual way, more

grievously afflicted the Church of God; till at that sad scene at the fords of Jordan we have seen a woefully clear figure of the passing away of brotherly love (Philadelphia) (Rev. 3), and the end has come, Laodicea is upon us, and our lot is also in the last days.

Yet forever, blessed be God, He lives; and to live, is for Him to love, and to love is to be active in grace; so we may be of good hope and cheer, for still have we reasonable ground to expect another, a last deliverance. But well may we study carefully the character of that deliverance that we look not for it in the wrong direction. And allow me to repeat for our safety what these meditations have already pressed upon us; *we must not look back*. Never, nevermore, may Israel expect a repetition of the past; nevermore an Othniel, an Ehud, a Barak, a Gideon, a Jephthah. Never, nevermore, may *we* expect a deliverance like those of the past; nevermore a Luther, a Zwingle, a Whitfield, a Wesley or any other of the honored servants that have passed away. Nor does God ever repeat Himself. His Word is, "I will lead the blind in a way that they know not." We are, perhaps, willing to confess our need of being led, but we feel like a blind man with his stick, for some familiar object that shall give him his bearings. If he can only touch something that he can recognize as familiar, he can go on confidently. No, God is not only leading the blind, but it is by a way *that they know not*; they have never been in exactly this place before; their stick is useless, there is no possible guide but Himself. Thus we are shut up to Him, not our own little dead stick of experience, but the living hand of faith in His and thus He will lead. The tendency in poor frail men is ever to look back and imitate; but imitation is not faith. Faith ever looks up and waits, whilst jealous of everything that does not bear clear marks of harmony with God's Word — it tests everything alone by this.

A book by a popular writer is before me entitled "The Next Great Awakening." It is an attractive title that almost compels investigation. We open it and find that the writer would lead us to look for the next deliverance in a greater emphasis being placed on the *earthly side of the Kingdom of God*! Spiritual affairs are no longer to hold an extremely prominent position! The unseen is to be relegated to its own comparatively unimportant place! The Church is to become more practical, and the healing of the sick, so prominent in the first preaching of the Kingdom, is to be again the equally prominent expression of this next great awakening.

It is well calculated to "please us well." It is as "fair" as those Philistine women of whom we shall read, that ensnared our Samson, and bears far more likeness to these than it does to Samson himself. But it serves at least to illustrate the crying need of prayerful discrimination and discernment in a day of the loudest claims on every hand.

To come back to our narrative, Israel is now given up for forty years, and that to the Philistines. We have met them before in the course of our book, and it may be well to look at them a little more closely. Who are these Philistines? and where shall we discern them today? Do they speak to us of the irreligious world of open, defiant profanity, of debased immorality? Is the peculiar danger of the last days to be looked for on this side? Or have they a far different appearance, and one peculiarly adapted to attract and ensnare a Nazarite? Not merely types of "sin," as so commonly interpreted, but of a strange, peculiar character of sin, that has even, under the loudest, strongest claims to "religion," deceived, bound, and blinded that holy principle of devotedness figured by the Nazarite. For again we must remember that men of that day do not figure, at least directly, men now; but moral or spiritual forces, that may govern any

people or any individual today.

Turning to the tenth chapter of Genesis, we find the genealogy of the Philistines. They are the children of Ham, and Ham is, as his name denotes, the "black one" or sunburnt. Dark indeed, but darkened by the sun. God wanted a man who should show us, as in a figure, or picture, what He sees man who is turned away from Himself (Light) to be, so He brings on to the stage of this world a "black man," a man made black by the sun, and crystallizes the sorrowful truth in his name, "Ham." A very clear picture of the "old man." The sun has shone upon him indeed, but he has not received the light. He has rejected the Light — has not come to the Light, has hated the Light, and, of course, it has not enlightened him; but it must have had some effect. What is it? It has been only to *darken* him. We may truthfully say that if he had never had light he would not have been dark as he is, and the brighter the light, the darker he has become. Now this is surely the picture of the Pharisee rather than the publican. It was the Pharisee, the religious man, who was warned "if the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." It was the Pharisee, the religious man, not the publican, of whom the Lord testified that his deeds were evil. It was the Pharisee, the religious man of that day, who, with the very Light of the World — the true, bright Light shining clearly right before his eyes — *asked for a sign*! As if one should ask for a light at noonday — what would it prove but his blindness? Oh, blind Pharisee, Oh, dark Pharisee, Oh, thou child of Ham, thou unregenerate religionist, thou unconverted church-member, how great was, and is even up to this day, thy darkness — a "black man" indeed!

Ham begets Mizraim, who gives his name to the country Egypt, and the country exemplifies the character that the word speaks of. That country is independent of God. It owes

everything to its river, the Nile, but of the source of that river it knows nothing. Egypt received the blessings it brought, with no true intelligence as to whence they came. Is it not exactly like the world in its distance from God? It is true that in these days men claim to have discovered the sources of the Nile in a chain of lakes south of the equator; and, in perfect accord with this, man has also discovered that all his blessings come to him purely from natural causes; he cannot trace the waters of the Nile back to their *heavenly* source, anymore than he does his blessings to their true prime Cause.

How naturally then, Mizraim gives birth to Casluhim, a word that in one form or another through the Scripture, speaks of "folly," and that through turning away from wisdom. The first chapter of Romans throws its light upon this word, "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools," and "their foolish heart was darkened." Oh, it is truly the descent, in every sense of the word, of the religious man of the earth, ever ascending in his own eyes, and thus ever getting further away from God.

From Casluhim comes the Philistine, the "Wanderer," never at home with God, never, never. Never knows he what it is to put his head down on a Father's breast, a returned, reconciled, self-judged, forgiven prodigal. He never knows what the emptying of heart in a childlike confession means. Cain was the first Philistine. The elder brother of Luke 15 bears all the marks of the Philistine as does the religious man of our day. *Religiousness* — a formal, correct, decent, respectable religiousness is the gravest danger of the last days.

The Philistine then, is a child of the flesh with much pretension to the blessings of faith, for we never find him outside of Immanuel's land. But he came from Egypt, where he is a native, and had wandered (as his name indicates) by the easy route, avoiding the Red Sea and Jordan, into the

land to which he at once gives his own name, Palestine. Could anything picture more startlingly, the natural man ignoring the cross of Christ, coming into the place of blessing "some other way," and then laying claim to all her inheritance that belongs to the Second Man, Christ, alone? It is the spirit of formalism, of worldly ecclesiasticism, soon to produce the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition (Goliath), that now lords it over the people of God, and we may give it the following marks:

*First.* Wherever there is an introduction of carnal principles — that is principles that the flesh can understand and approve — into the things of God, there is the Philistine.

*Second.* Wherever there is the teaching of some other way into the land of blessing than by the Red Sea and Jordan (the cross of Christ) there is the Philistine.

*Third.* Wherever there are claims to sole authority over the refreshing fountain of God's Word, which is then tightly shut up, there is the Philistine, for that is how his ancestors treated Abraham's wells.

*Fourth.* Wherever you get uncertainty as to sins forgiven — a dread, cold fear that all is not well, for there is no knowledge of a sacrifice that takes away sin — there is the work of the Philistine.

*Fifth.* Wherever you get principles that would bind the energy of faith, there is the Philistine. And one may still further question whether there are not other phases of Philistinism, far more subtle and dangerous in these last days, than these open expressions of it. The Philistine women of whom we shall read were not warriors, but they were ever the ensnarers of the Nazarite. We shall look at them closely directly.

We must not forget, too, the teaching in the Philistine's king, Abimelech; meaning, "my father was king." It is the claim of succession so fully exemplified in that "apostolic succession" that is the very chief, or king, of all Rome's pretentions. But it is not confined to Rome. Nay, like every other mark of Philistinism, it may be found in that which may be looked upon as the very antipodes of Rome. Have we never heard, amid all the contentions and strifes of the people of God, similar claims to representing the only original company, "my Father was King," and here am I, His only heir and representative. So the Lord's people are everywhere set searching for the True Church, or for the only Company that has any just claim to represent it, till in the search, amid all the confusion, simple souls lose all their sweet simplicity, like fruit all marred by human handling; the fresh bloom all gone, they become learned in evil, and usually end by imagining that they have discovered where the true succession is — the real representative of the original Church or Assembly. Yet, strange to say, each comes to a different conclusion, and, raising their voices to swell the claim of the party they have joined, they add to the din. On every side one hears such boasts as these, each company crying, "Abimelech" — it is not *his* father or *their* father, but *my* father that was king. And — as it was of old-time, when there were two Popes, one at Rome and another at Avignon — the poor simple sheep of the flock find that they cannot avoid the curse of excommunication from one or the other or both. If you join with any one, you get the excommunication of the others; if you join none, you get the excommunication of *all*. Who shall deliver? Who *did* deliver? The Nazarite then, and the spirit of Nazariteship only, now. This the Word of God clearly tells us is the last, the only possible deliverance in these last days.

It will not be necessary to go into a detailed examination of Nazariteship. Will my readers please turn to Numbers 6, which will show that some secret, hidden motive led to the giving up of all that was held dear by men naturally. Whilst all others might enjoy the vine and its fruit in every form, he, with no compulsion whatever, but quite voluntarily, touched it not. Yet no mournful one was he, a holy joy spake aloud of some secret source of satisfaction that could not be accounted for naturally. How clearly, how sweetly, this speaks of the all sufficiency of Christ to fill the heart with joy quite independent of all earth's pleasures. And is *this* then, to be the character of our deliverance in these last days, not a great company, no great work, but each individual learning for himself what there is in Christ, and so spontaneously giving up, not in the slightest degree by legal compulsion, every other and inferior source of satisfaction? Telling to the world that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and is in no tomb of earth, but lives, and lives the Savior of His people. My dear reader, what prevents your being a Nazarite deliverer?

Then, too, the Nazarite confesses by that head on which no razor was ever to come, that he has learned the precious secret of the strength of helplessness. His long hair was a veil that hid him, even as the woman to whom it has been given for a covering (1 Cor. 11). But "it is a shame for a man to wear long hair"; never mind, the Nazarite accepts the shame and it becomes his glory, for that very hair is called his crown. (See Num. 6:7, where the word "consecration" may be translated crown, as it is Lev. 21:12.) Yes, he learns to glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him, and *in that power we shall see him slaying lions and thousands of* foes. Oh, weak are a thousand Philistines against the Son of God, who only needs human helplessness by which to display His strength. Is this the character of the only deliverance that we may now look for? Each individual learning more acutely

his own helplessness, his Lord's strength? That in the last days, the living Lord is looking for weak, not strong ones? If this is the case, is there anything to hinder your being a Nazarite deliverer?

Finally, the deepest, sweetest secret of all, the Nazarite confesses that he has another life altogether, entirely outside this scene of death, a new-creation, resurrection life, entirely unaffected by all that death can do, strike where it will — His life is in a scene that death cannot touch or affect at all. And is this the only deliverance to be now expected? Individuals discovering for themselves that it is no musty, dead, theological dogma, but a simple, living truth that their "life is hid with Christ in God," and that the "Spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus has made them free from the law of sin and death." Is this the only hope of deliverance now? Shall we look in vain for a repetition of the mighty revivals of the past? Surely is it, at all events divinely consistent with the last word to the poor last Church, "if *any man* hear my voice" — an individual response to the Lord's knocking. Will you take that lonely place, my reader, and claim the Nazarite's unseen portion in Christ Jesus.

With these preliminaries let us turn to our narrative, and how sad is Israel's condition now. We used to hear her crying at least, under oppression, but there is no cry now. Either contentment or despair has resulted in complete apathy. It is one of the signs of the last times. There is always hope as long as there is a cry; but contentment short of God — short of perfect freedom from a lifeless form that can give no light or love, no power or comfort — short of the joyous liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, is the saddest of conditions, and — the last.

We have noted that the Lord has had to be increasingly careful in these deliverances "lest Israel vaunt themselves."

We have had left-handed men and women-prophetesses; but now that He has to come in in sovereign grace — not in answer to any cry — it must be nothing less expressive of perfect helplessness, and the absolute necessity for such intervention, than a barren woman.

To one such, and she so insignificant as to be unnamed, the Angel of the Lord comes. That same glorious Person who had led from Gilgal to Bochim, who had appeared to Gideon as he threshed wheat; now for the third and last time in the book comes to this unnamed, unknown, helpless, barren woman. His first sentence, too, is not in grace, but truth. "Behold now thou art barren and bearest not." Ah, did she now know it? Had she not for years felt the reproach of barrenness? Had it not been the burden of her heart, the one theme of her cries to God? Yet this Angel of Jehovah touches the tender, sensitive spot and says, "Thou art barren."

Beloved it speaks loudly to us. We, too, if we are to be used at all as vessels of blessing, need to have it still more deeply impressed upon us that we are "barren" and "helpless"; we, too, need to hear a divine voice speaking the truth in no reproach, but "in love." Thou art helpless for fruit bearing. Grace must necessarily precede truth in God's approach to man. Were He to come in truth first, who could stand? But "grace and truth" came by Jesus Christ. But when man draws nigh to God, then the *truth* as to man must precede the display of *grace*, as the Syrophoenician woman found — "first, righteousness, then peace."

But grace quickly follows truth, and a son is promised, whose arrival was to be anticipated by a course in harmony with the Nazarite that son was to be. His mother must be a Nazarite first, and — according to the first characteristic of such — abstain from wine and strong drink, and eat no unclean thing. Then, as to the son, the second mark of the

Nazarite was ever to characterize him: "never must razor come upon his head." He was to be a hidden one as long as he lived, and thus should he "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." I fear it is a prophetic word of this "Angel" that he should only "begin," spoken in divine foreknowledge; for certainly Samson never completed this deliverance. It must be a very imperfect deliverance, when the deliverer himself dies in captivity.

The woman naturally hastens to her husband and tells him the blessed news. She describes her Visitor, first as a man of God; but still evidently takes Him for more, for she adds that "His countenance was as an angel of God, very terrible," i.e., awesome, commanding reverence. "But," she adds, "I asked Him not whence He was, neither told He me His name. She appears to regret that, in the internal commotion caused by the interview she has omitted this.

Manoah now cries — a cry awakened at last — to Jehovah, and in gracious response to this, another interview is granted. But again, with an evident divine purpose, Manoah is passed over, and the Angel appears to the woman as she sits alone in the field. *Man is excluded as far as possible in this last deliverance.* And we may be quite sure that so it will be today.

In response to Manoah's question, absolutely nothing is really added to what had been previously told to the woman. Only a Nazarite could give birth to a Nazarite. I can but see in this a suggestion of what Samson so often is, a *contrast* to the Lord of Glory, whose own inherent holiness was preserved from the slightest touch of the evil in the human mother who bore Him. Samson has not this purely divine quality. The mother, therefore, herself must correspond with what is desired.

Thus far as to history; but may there not be other and

deeper spiritual suggestions very practical for us in this?

In the bright, fresh morning of Israel's day, a man learned some wondrous secret of Jehovah that led him, with no compulsion whatever, to give up all that the vine could give — all the joys of earth. And not only this, but to take the place of weakness and shame, and of glorying alone in the One of whose strength he had learned as being all for him.

Now, in the evening of this day — a figure, as we believe, of the evening of this age, an "evening" in which *we* live — there are no Nazarites in this way. Not one in whom the energy of faith has so grasped the fullness of Jehovah or, as we may say, of the Lord Jesus, as voluntarily to take the Nazarite place. A Nazarite is needed; the Nazarite spirit has died out; a special intervention of sovereign grace alone can call it into existence.

But in what way? The spirit of Nazariteship *in separation from earth's joys and defilement,* alone can possibly produce the deeper spirit of Nazariteship of such *glorying in the Lord* as leads to deliverance from the Philistine. This must come first, giving birth to the other. First, there must be separation to the Lord Jesus, as the all-sufficient Joy-Giver; then this leads very naturally to — is the mother of — separation to Him as the all-sufficient Strength-Giver, who delivers His people from a cold, lifeless, formalism, typified by the Philistine.

Now mark the correspondence of this with the divinely drawn picture of the last perilous days in 2 Timothy 3. Amongst other marks we have, "men shall be . . . lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Surely no one can fail to recognize the likeness in our own times. Pleasure-loving certainly characterizes them, and this is found fully developed in what is called the "church-life" of the day.

Entertainments, plays, beautiful music and a hundred other expressions of this are prominent amongst the professing people of God. Now, first, there must be deliverance from these; there must be such a view of the Lord Jesus as shall deliver from this pleasure-loving in divine things. No one can be really used for deliverance as a Nazarite who is mixed up with this. In other words, the mother of the Nazarite must be separate from the vine and everything unclean, and these worldly forms of amusement are distinctly unclean.

But the last feature of these last days is "a form of godliness" without the *power*. From this, too, must there be deliverance; and it comes in its own order, in the later Nazariteship that springs from the earlier, and has learned, indeed, the secret of the power of godliness, even apart from the *form*.

Do we not see now why we are not told the woman's name? We must find her significance — what she represents — not in her name, but in what God makes her: a Nazarite from wine; for only thus could she give birth to the Nazarite of Deliverance.

To return to the narrative. Do you not love to see the identity between Jehovah and Jesus? Mark it in this, for Manoah now proffers hospitality. He really knows not to whom, and is, therefore, refused. It is exactly as when the young man said, "*Good* master" (Mk. 10:17). He proffered to the same Person courtesy, but it was in the same way and for the same reason refused; and yet, in both cases, in a gracious, suggestive way, as if inviting to go further. See the parallel:

| | |
|---|---|
| "If thou will offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it to Jehovah." | "Why callest thou me good? There is none good, but One — God." |

Only as Jehovah, only as God, only as acknowledged in His true glory, will he accept either hospitality or courtesy. Oh, glorious identity in the rightful claim to divine dignity!

But Manoah does not apparently catch the suggestion of the divine dignity claimed, any more than did the "young man" of Mark's Gospel. A prophet He is, doubtless, and he would honor Him as such. "What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass, we may do thee honor?" He evidently has no inkling as yet as to the real glory of the One to whom he is speaking. His speech is altogether too conventional, too formal, too patronizing. The affections are not yet sufficiently stirred, the conscience is still torpid, the spirit is still dormant. So this question, "What is thy name," is met by another. "Why askest thou thus — in this dull foolish way — after my name?"

The questioner is thrown back on himself; his motive is tested, and by this very means deeper anxiety to know is introduced, as fishermen draw away the lure to increase the eagerness of the fish. Here is the Fisher of men dealing as He has done before and since. For in a similar way He spoke to Jacob, who also asked Him His name, "Why askest thou My name?" Dost thou really want to know? Hast thou any idea that under the veil of this form is a glory that thou wouldst see? Oughtest thou not to have known, and without asking, who it is that has borne with thee so long? Who but one could combine such faithfulness, such strength, that with a touch could make thee helpless, with such tenderness and compassion that supports thee as soon as thou are helpless? How clearly this suggests that He is far more than His questioner dreams.

So later in that gospel of John, in which His divine glory is seen when Pilate first spoke to Him, he was asked "Art thou the King of the Jews;" i.e., in a sense "What is thy name?"

"Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" is again "Why asketh thou of my name?" Dost thou really care to know, because there is awakened in thy poor dark heart a thought that thou hast Jehovah, the One true God, in human form before thee, or is it merely a foolish accusation that thou art passing on without any personal exercise? Thy answer to this must govern my answer to thee." It is the same Person dealing with inquiries in similar ways all through time, and is so dealing with you, my dear reader, ever seeking to awaken the appetite He longs to fill, until with Paul we pant, "That I may know Him."

Here in our narrative He adds: Seeing it is "Secret" or "Wonderful." And it may not be profitless, by the grace of this same living blessed Speaker, to consider this word a little to open it, as we might a casket, and see if there be not a treasure in it. The word here rendered "Secret" bears no resemblance whatever to those ordinarily so translated. It is "pil-ee," and exactly the same word, in slightly different form, may be found in the next verse: did "*Wondrously*," and again (Isa. 9:6) His name shall be called "*Wonderful*." Here then we have in Isaiah's glorious prophecy another claimant to the same name. Are they rivals, or is it the same one? Surely there is but One who has any true title to the name of "Wonderful," ever the same One, let Him be called "Jehovah," "the angel of the Lord," "the Mighty God," "the Father of Eternity," "the Child born," "Immanuel" or "Jesus." All, all is "wonderful" indeed, is it not?

And it is interesting enough to see that it is exactly the same word "Pahlah" (the root verb) that is attached to the Nazarite vow. "When a man or woman shall make a '*special*' (*pahlah*) or '*wonderful*' vow" (Num. 6:6, R.V.). A vow that has no visible motive; the result of some hidden secret — thus, and thus only, were and are Nazarites formed. Flesh

and blood can never comprehend the Nazarite vow, it is "*wonderful.*" It was intended to be so, as a most mighty testimony to the one blessed One, who can by His own essential loveliness and beauty — His divine fullness, His human winsomeness, make even you and me Nazarites in proportion as we discover "*His Name.*"

So not to deny or discourage does He say, "Why dost thou ask," but to further quicken longing, and to encourage desire. So Manoah offers the kid and the meal-offering to Jehovah. Nor is a fitting altar lacking: "*The Rock*" (R. V.) is there. But what or who is that? Surely every word is redolent of Christ. This is the very Rock that followed His people all through their desert journeyings, quenching ever their thirst as it returned. It is the same Rock which, under the law's rod of judgment, has been smitten, and the water of life has flowed forth to be taken freely by "*whosoever will.*" This is the very Rock in whose cleft side the favored Moses was hidden whilst the glory of the Lord passed by. In a word, it is none other than "Christ cruicified": our "altar" that sanctifies every gift, and by whom we may alone "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually."

And now "He does wondrously," in full accord with His name. The flame of the offering ascends from that holy altar, and with it ascends the angel of Jehovah. Ah! the secret is out. He is known. It is as when somewhat later He (again note the identifying marks) broke bread when He was proffered hospitality at Emmaus, and again the eyes of two poor "unbelieving believers" are opened, and they know Him, and He vanishes out of their sight. Here He adds Himself to the offering; and this, we may safely say, is the only value it possesses; but who can estimate its worth now? He to whom it ascends, and only He. "To all our prayers and praises; He adds His sweet perfume."

Now listen to the way "Mistrust" argues on the one hand, and simple Faith on the other, and judge which is the closest akin to reason or common sense. Says Manoah: "We shall surely die, because we have seen God."

Says his wife, "If Jehovah were pleased to kill us He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands; neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have, told us such things as these."

Of course not, this is the soundest reasoning and the plainest common sense. Yet are we not ever ready to adopt Manoah's line and argue from ourselves up to *God*. We are sinners, we have failed, we have acted inconsistently, surely there is no escape — God must slay. Oh, no; no, says Faith, "look at that cross on which hangs His own dear Son. Would He be there if He even thought hardly of us? And see, He has accepted the offering with complete complacency and delight; for that same Beloved One, our Substitute under judgment, sits now on his Father's throne; and yet again, He has sent down His Holy Spirit to tell us all these things, and show us things to come. No, no He loves us!" Thus faith reasons admirably; every mercy is a token for good. If He wanted to kill, He could do so without revealing His goodness and mercy. Certainly He could.

## Chapter 14
## SAMSON (continued)

# THE WOMAN OF TIMNATH

In due time the promised son is born, and his mother calls his name Samson. The meaning of this word is disputed, but I can see no reason for rejecting that which is, as Mr. F. W. Grant says,* "etymologically most simple": "sun-like." The Nazarite is not the sun, but represents him in the time of his absence, as being the only light the world gets. Every time Samson's name was mentioned, it would remind him of the very reason of his existence: he is to shine as a testimony to his absent Lord. Is this not enough to suggest to us and to lead us to expect a correspondence between Samson and that Church which certainly was to shine for Him, the true Sun, during the night of His absence?

Now to *shine* is not at all to draw attention to oneself; that is ever to *hide* the light (there was absolutely nothing to look at in Samson), but to draw attention to Christ, as being and doing what He only could be or do — this is to shine. How our carnal minds mistake here, and when we quote "let your light so shine before men," we overlook the immense force of the little word "so," in connection with what follows, "that men may see your good works." If men see my good works, why should they not glorify *me*? If they are mine, that would be only just. But is this the end? Indeed, no. If there be not

*Although he does not adopt it.

something in those "good works" that convinces men that they are not really mine at all, but supernatural — yea, divine — then are they vile, "filthy rags," and there is nothing very shining or glorious in such things, is there? But when men clearly see that you or I could not do them, and thus are compelled to glorify our Father which is in heaven, who alone could, then is there a shining indeed. See Paul's "good works" — "they glorified God in me" (Gal. 1). Nothing less than God could account for such sweet waters coming from such a naturally bitter spring as Saul of Tarsus. Then again, I feel assured in the name Samson, is the Nazarite secret told out: he is only "sun-like," to the "sun" alone is due all praise, then and now.

"And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol." That is in his own home, there his spirit is stirred before there is any public expression of power.

So with you and me the closet must precede the battlefield. No man was ever truly used of God who was not first moved by His Spirit in secret to cry to Him for the "best gifts" in view of the needs and condition of His people. Oh, see and meditate even now on the successful work of the enemy on every hand, art thou not too "moved?" See the Philistine dominion everywhere, even over those who are Christ's free men; is not thy spirit, too, stirred? Consider the deep, deep need of the flock; does it not affect thee? Consider the fullness and sufficiency there is in Christ to meet it all and wilt thou not too, my reader, "covet the best gifts," that shall hide thee altogether, like the covered Nazarite, and be alone for the profit of those so dear to thy Lord? Harken to the sigh of the Spirit breathed out long ago. "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." And what are the things that the Lord Jesus calls His? The preceding words suggest

the answer — "for I have no man like-minded who will naturally care for *your state*." Christ's dearest interests are all inwrapped in His poor people on earth; His heart is with these. Oh for grace, even now, to care for His things.

We now come to the history of Samson, which is divided into two parts, marked by the words "and he judged Israel twenty years" (chs. 15:20, 16:31). The first tells of his mighty works, the last of his fall, captivity and death.

And yet do these very mighty works begin ominously enough, he "*goes down*" — (mark the trend of his path — is it not like the road from Jerusalem to Jericho?) to Timnath, for there he has found a daughter of the Philistines whom he desires to espouse. Now this fair woman is the first of three, all leading in the same direction and ending in the humiliation and death of Samson. We, therefore, must be careful in our interpretation here. She has no personal name, but is simply called "a woman of Timnath, a daughter of the Philistines."

We are dependent then on this word "Timnath," for the significance of the incident. It means "Portion," and if it has a bad significance, as the Philistine connection would certainly demand, it would appear as if Samson were leaving his own "portion" and taking up with that which was not his at all; exactly as his parents say, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren." It is a close alliance with the enemy, and yet "it is of the Lord" — strange word! But we may feel sure that this is not in the sense that He is the Author or Suggestor of such an evil alliance; but He permits it and will cause it to work out His own purposes, it will give "an occasion against the Philistines." So has it been in this day. Luther, too, at first, fell quite in love with the Philistine, and sought to draw very close to her of Rome. It was "of the Lord," for that very thing led him clearly to discern the evil

character of what he was seeking to embrace; and resulted in "an occasion against the Philistine," indeed.

Still it is a dangerous path Samson takes to reach this fair woman; he has to go through the vineyards of Timnath, and there a young lion roars in meeting him.

This lion is found in the vineyards of Timnath — a place surely filled with danger to him who must eat "nothing of the vine, from the seedstone to the skin" (Num. 6). It is the portion in the pleasures of this world that the Philistine gives to his people ever. But the lion is there, amid the pleasures of earth; the portion of the worlding — and as soon as a Nazarite is seen, he recognizes at once an enemy and roars against him. This is evidently to instill fear; for the Scriptures tell us that this is significant of the lion's roar: "The lion hath roared — who will not fear" (Amos 3:8). And the lion is, equally, clearly, our "adversary the devil, who goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5). This expresses the *violent* side of his evil character and his power of striking terror. Anything that induces cowardly fear, as "persecution," is the lion's roar, and mark it well, you can never introduce a Nazarite principle into this world of pleasure without awakening a *roar*. Let any servant of the Lord in this pleasure-loving age preach faithfully the cross of Christ and His place of rejection, and he stands a good chance of being turned out — it is the lion's roar.

But do you say, "The days of persecution are over"? Then surely, if the Scriptures are true, the days of even any *desire* to live piously in Christ Jesus are over too; for it is written, "*All* that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3). God be thanked, neither is true; but, perhaps, persecution is a very different thing from what we esteem it. We connect it alone with the dungeon, the rack, the sword, or

the stake; or at the best "wandering in sheepskins and goatskins" and hiding "in dens and caves of the earth." Well, there can be no doubt but that this is persecution indeed; and if nothing else is that, then since such ways do not prevail in Christendom now, persecution has ceased to exist. But we may well be thankful that God esteems much less than this to be "persecution." Turn to Galations 4:29, "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so is it now." Yes, even now — June, 1903. For what was that shocking persecution, so severe as to be noticed by the solicitous eye of God? Here it is: "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had borne unto Abraham, *mocking*." That was all. There was no blow at all, only mockery and ridicule; but God fully recognizes it as "*persecution*." It is the inevitable opposition of the flesh to what is of the Spirit; and the mocking sneer is but the precursor, if opportunity affords, for every form of more violent opposition. So, long afterwards, when the Lord is speaking those wonderful words on the mount, He does not say, "Blessed are ye when men shall *torture* you," few might be so blessed; but "when men shall *revile* you," and few will escape this.

Nay, nay, my dear reader, if you show the Spirit of the Nazarite, which speaks of Christ, in any pleasure-scene of this world, you will hear the lion's roar, if only in a scoffing word, a sneering taunt, a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders; and how prone we are to be terribly frightened even by such a roar as that and to run away — are we not?

But this is just what must never be done in all conflict with the devil; he is to be resisted — "whom resist steadfast in the faith," and to this is added, "and he will flee from you," which is much the more satisfactory ending to any conflict. Towards this enemy then the front alone must be presented.

We have, you know, no armor at all provided for the back (Eph. 6) so this must not be exposed to him.

But there *is* an enemy from whom we must run away; and, strangely enough, this enemy is within us, not outside at all. Listen.

"Flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). "Flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18). "Flee from idolatry" (covetousness is idolatry) (1 Cor. 10:14). "Flee these things," i.e., love of money, etc. (1 Tim. 6:9). "Abstain, or draw off from fleshly lusts" (1 Pet. 2:11). So, consistently all through the New Testament, we are warned not to attempt to fight the old nature, with all its evil desires; but to "flee," "turn away," "abstain from" it. Our path homeward, like Israel's of old, does not lie through Edom — a figure of the flesh. We are not to conquer here, but turn away from him (Num. 20). How much we pervert these things, and think we are called to fight the flesh, whilst we flee from the devil.

But let us have done with vague, indistinct notions as to both these things. We can only turn away from Edom when we know well that our way is not in that direction. Only *as strangers and pilgrims* can we abstain from fleshly lusts; having our hearts' interests and affections elsewhere. It is with these lusts that the poor man in the last part of Romans 7, is trying to wage an unequal conflict, till, with a sigh of relief, he finds that the Spirit's law is *not* self-conflict, flesh-fighting, but his life's hope, with all its resources and powers, is alone in Christ Jesus; and the full recognition of this, practically, in constant dependence on, and occupation with Christ, makes free from the law of sin in his members — in Old Testament language, he turns away from Edom.

So, as to the conflict with the devil, we must not be ignorant of his system of attack. I do not doubt but that the

trinity of evil, "the world, the flesh, and the devil," are closely intertwined, and that the last uses both the others for his ends: but the end and ultimate purpose of all his endeavor is not merely to induce men to the coarser sins, such as dissipation, drunkenness or lust; but, far more subtle, he seeks ever to lead to distrust of God, and complacent confidence in self; whilst "rejoicing in Christ Jesus," we are really *resisting* the devil.

But we must return to our narrative. The roar is of little account with a hidden veiled Nazarite. "The Spirit of the Lord comes on him mightily, and he tears him as a kid." Surely this is not a fight between a man and a lion; no man could tear a lion as a kid; but between "the Spirit of the Lord and the lion," and there is no question as to the result in that case. Oh, my dear brethren, it were well if we estimated our foe more correctly — gave him his proper place. He is the very highest created intelligence and no creature among the principalities and powers can excel him either in subtle wisdom or cruel force. How powerless the strongest human arm, the keenest human intellect against him who was "perfect in his ways, from the day he was created till iniquity was found in him" (Ezek. 28).

Only one stronger than he could bind this strong man, and take his goods from him; and only in absolute joyous dependence on Him can we successfully resist him. Then it is not a question between Satan and me, but between my Lord and Satan, and the result always is that he is torn as a kid! Glory be to Him who is worthy!

It is Samson's first conflict; and fresh from it, still the Philistine woman "pleased him well." Strange infatuation! Is it possible that even today one may be governed by the spirit of the Nazarite — having the Spirit of God abiding in one — can tear the lion, and yet at the same time be pleased with

some fair enemy in friendly guise, that shall eventually put out the eyes and make sport of one? We must surely seek to learn who these women are, and where to look for them before we finish.

Some time passes, and now Samson is on his way once more, with his parents in his company, to a wedding feast. As he passes the spot where he had previously met the lion, he turns aside and finds the carcass already bleached and a swarm of bees within it. He takes of the honey, eats of it himself, and gives it to his father and mother, all unconscious as they are of whence it came, and then it affords material for a riddle at the feast.

Here thirty Philistines compose the company (and a very bad company for a Nazarite it is); but Samson proposes this riddle, wagering a change of raiment with each of the thirty, that they will not solve it in seven days.

"Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness."

Three days pass, and suffice to manifest the inability of the Philistine to solve the riddle. No Philistine ever can expound how an eater can yield meat. This is quite contrary to the way of nature; and so, to all Philistine thought which know nothing of God coming in, and making everything serve his purpose: bringing blessing out of our strongest foe.

One is tempted to pause here, and attempt to extract for ourselves a little "sweetness" out of Samson's riddle; for surely our Samson, too, has met our foe with "nothing in his hand," and where do we get such sweet meat as the result of that conflict? So all through there is the same story: the lion roared against poor Job; but in the end he yields meat; all his efforts to damage are turned to blessing, to the glory of the Lord. But we must pass on to the narrative.

Samson loses his wager. The Philistine woman finds out his weak side. He can tear a lion, but a weeping woman is too much for him. The incident reveals the Nazarite's real weakness at the very beginning of his course, a weakness that will be the cause of his utter blindness and wretchedness at its end. For the woman of Timnath is but a counterpart of Delilah of Sorek. It is the "wile" of the enemy, not the "fiery dart"; the craft, not the strength; the sweet blandishments of some Philistine principle that is embraced and against which the Nazarite is weak. But this is all too vague. What is a "Philistine principle" that could so work today? We must remember that the Philistine, whilst really Egyptian, the "old man," is yet a *religious* principle of the flesh, so the woman will be some fair looking religiousness, well suited to the "first man," some principle, the end of which, literally carried out, leads to the full uncovering of the Nazarite. Is not "legality" such an one? Were not the Galatians embracing this woman of Timnath? Did she not please them well? Was she not fair to them? They were leaving their own portion; for as Paul told them plainly, "If ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing." They had lost their own true portion. I am sure there are a hundred principles, not as evident or fundamental as this, which are Philistine. The Corinthians were probably nearer the Timnath woman, in their love of showy gifts.

The slightest trust in the flesh — all that is not faith in Christ's grace — all the worldly ways, now so current in what is so rightly called "*church*-work," for it is not fully or truly "the work of the Lord." All these are "daughters of the Philistine." For example, the modern system of revival — to which our Samson, in his failure, so closely answers — in which, whilst there doubtless often is more or less of true faithful service, yet to effect the end *an alliance even with the enemy is sought*; the aid of the world is sought in obtaining

deliverance *from* the world! Fleshly attractions, eloquent speakers, exquisite music, cunning schemes for gathering crowds to attract crowds; all the churches closed except one, thus awakening a natural excitement, all these are daughters of the Philistine, very fair, all serving religion and pleasing us well; but very, very dangerous. For whilst at first they may not appear serious, they point to the possibility of their becoming so in the future; nor do they ever radically aid, but always hinder, the Nazarite.

## Chapter 15

# SAMSON (continued)

Samson loses his wife after all, she is given to his "friend!" Thus, the embracing of that Philistine principle that looked so fair has resulted in nothing but trouble — no deliverance to Israel. Nay, the end has not yet come; for Samson, apparently incensed by this breach of faith, strikes again. "And Samson went and caught 300 foxes, and took torches, and turned tail to tail, and put a torch in the midst between the two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistine, and burnt up both the shocks and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives."

What does all this mean? What is there in it for "the man of God" today? The mere historical fact seems altogether too trivial for a place in God's Word, if there be not a deeper meaning in it. Let us seek it, in dependence on God.

And first we must note that no Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson here. Whenever this is said, His mighty deeds are very worthy, they are truly works of faith. The omission of this here is therefore full of significance. Samson is acting apart from the Spirit of the Lord. Now this puts the key of the incident into our hands. We must not expect anything admirable or praiseworthy in anything that is not "after the Spirit." Samson is now walking after the flesh, although he seems to be aiming at the Philistines.

Now then note, to carry out his ideas, Samson requires foxes, or — as undoubtedly it should be — jackals, and he catches 300 of them. There is nothing very glorious in Samson catching jackals, is there? His friends would hardly be wondering at the secret of his great strength as they saw him running after jackals! It is a poor business for a Nazarite! For if we throw the light of God's Word on these creatures we shall clearly get their significance. Look at Nehemiah 4:3, "If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." Here the fox or jackal (it is always the same word) is clearly a figure of *insignificance* and *weakness*. Next, Psalm 63:11, "They shall be a portion for foxes," suggests to us that it is an unclean creature, feeding on carrion. Song of Solomon 2:15 will be enough to complete the picture, and here these "little foxes that spoil the grapes," have always been rightly interpreted as figuring the "*sins*" that mar the believers' fruitfulness.

Now we see quite clearly that the foxes Samson caught must figure some unclean thing that accorded with his present purpose. He is going to make the unclean jackal the minister of his vengeance, not a worthy act for a Nazarite; nay, we may say it was a great loss of moral dignity. But are such things quite unknown today? Do not many Nazarites, "strong, earnest souls," sometimes use *unclean means to give expression to their indignation* and to work a personal revenge? Oh, I am persuaded there are few of the Lord's people who have not at some time or other caught, and used, foxes.

Next Samson turns these foxes tail to tail and puts a firebrand or torch between the two tails.

What is a firebrand or torch? I am inclined to think its meaning very largely depends upon the source of the fire that sets it alight. If God kindle the torch, then it must have a good

meaning, as that that Abraham saw passing between the pieces of the sacrifices; but if men kindle it, then it may have quite another bearing. Now, here, Samson himself — not led by the Spirit, mind — sets fire to the torches. I gather, therefore, that the torch speaks of fleshly anger — of carnal indignation — rather than divine judgment.

Now, let a word from the apostle James throw its holy light on these torches. "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell (gehenna)."

This helps us much, and tells us, I judge, where Samson's fire came from. James says the tongue is like a bit, or a rudder, very small but very effective. Control the bit, and you control the horse; control the rudder, and you control the ship; control the tongue, and you control the man. It is the heart really that is meant, of which the tongue is the index, and it is a *great boaster*; and in thus boasting, represents fully the first man who, in various ways, even *opposite to each other*, just like Samson's foxes, "tail to tail," yet, in all, seeks his own glory. And what mischief the tongue can do! It is like a spark in a wood, let it get headway and who can extinguish it? Let it have its way under control of the old nature (foxes) and it will set on fire everything with which in the natural course of things it comes in contact. But trace those burning passions to their true source, these "righteous indignations," as we love to speak, and whence come they? From Gehenna — Hell. It is the awful energy of evil.

Now, this is what Samson did. He kindled the torch with his own fire, and then gave up all control of it to 300 jackals

to be taken wherever these unclean things listed: Samson and his 300, as we may call them: and what a contrast to Gideon and *his* 300, who held the torches in their hands, where they affected the enemy only. Samson's 300 destroy the corn, the wine, and the oil.

Is this a good thing? Does this deliver Israel? Is this for the blessing of the Lord's people? Most surely not. There is nothing bad in corn, or wine, or oil, quite the contrary, they are the produce of *Israel's*, or rather Immanuel's, land; and therefore ought not to belong to the Philistine; but it is not God's way to *destroy* the growth of His land. He is always careful of it, so much so that no tree that gave fruit for man was to be cut down, even in laying siege to an enemy's city (Dt. 20:19, 20). So, too, whilst the old corn of the land was grown under the Canaanites, it became the food of the Lord's people as soon as they crossed Jordan; it is not a type of evil, therefore, but good. This being very clearly the case, we may say with absolute assurance that the corn, the wine, and the oil speak of the blessings that belong to faith and are found in Christ — the food, the joy, the power of God's people. These are never to be burnt, even though they may be in the Philistine's possession, but should be rescued from the Philistine and given back to Israel.

What a foolish thing Samson did when he let these firebrands loose at the tail of foxes! Who could tell what mischief would result, or where it would end! Surely, surely the only right place, the only safe place for a torch is kept well in hand like a bit, or rudder, where it can be controlled, and its flame directed against proper objects, where we may be "angry and not sin." Yes, we can see *that* clearly enough, but let us be careful or we shall be a David, uttering our own judgment and the Spirit of God will say to our conscience "*Thou* art the man."

Dear reader, have you never opposed flesh by flesh — evil in an evil way? Have you never lost control, and turned loose fleshly anger at the tail of impure motives with evil results? Oh, yes, Samson was a Nazarite, but a Nazarite apart from the Spirit of the Lord can do ten times more mischief than another man. Even so, let the separated man of God today mistake his own indignation for fire of God, and it is as sure as anything, the corn, the wine, the oil: the food, the joy, the blessing of God's people will be consumed. We are living in Samson-days, and some of us have seen the mighty works that this spirit of separation can do under control of the Spirit; and have we not seen, too, the mighty evil it can do when flesh controls instead of the Spirit? And some such word as this applies, "If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another," that is how such fire acts.

The incident of this woman of Timnath is not yet closed. Fire answers fire, and Samson's wife and her father are burnt. Ah, the Philistine is deadly opposed to everything in any way allied to true separation to Jehovah. Samson retaliates, smiting them hip and thigh. Yes, he still has energy; he *hates what the Lord hates*, although his *love* is wrongly directed.

And I have been much interested in noting the striking parallel there is, at times at least, between the course of Samson and the path of the Church, as prophetically marked out in the letters to the seven assemblies. The Church was surely to maintain a Nazarite testimony to her absent Lord. She was to show He was risen by the evidence of a heart fully satisfied with Himself. And what do we find in that first letter to Ephesus? There is much energy and strength, as with Samson and the lion. It closes, too, in a way, as this incident, with the commendation "This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate." It is not the place

to interpret Revelation, but these Nicolaitans are only Philistines, in another guise. Both Samson and Church could show a well-directed *hate*; but Samson left his own *"portion"* when he went to Timnath (portion), as did the Church when she left her first love — is there not a clear and true, if sad, correspondence here?

But now we get a much brighter, happier incident, as far as Samson is concerned. He retires to the rock Etam, and dwells in the cleft of the rock (R. V.). A good place for a Nazarite to dwell is the *cleft of the rock*; it is the natural dwelling of those feeble *folk*, the conies, and *all people with long hair*. Here Moses stood in safety and peace, whilst the glory of the Lord passed by. It is Christ crucified, ever the abiding place of faith. Surely we may look for recovery and restoration now.

The Philistines come up, and 3,000 men of Judah consent to give up Samson to them. Have you never heard of men who "say they are Jews and are not?" Surely these "men of Judah" were akin to such. "Knowest thou not," say they, "that the Philistines are rulers over us." Oh, poor men of Judah, how low have they sunken. But I'm not quite sure that we can afford to blame them, for have we, my dear reader, permit me again to ask, never given up divine principles of separation, in which alone is divine strength, because we are subject to what has about it the claims of tradition and antiquity; as ecclesiasticism, in which there is no power or life. Aye, *I am sure we often give up the principle that is* intended for our deliverance; a captive to a lifeless formalism. When the Lord's people have been stirred by some evidence of God's free grace that has burst through the barriers, have you never heard of some "man of Judah" saying: "This is quite irregular; this is against all order, you are breaking through all traditional rules and ecclesiastical forms; and these are our masters. We are governed by form, which will

not permit anything of this kind"?

It is beautiful and pathetic to hear Samson say, "Fall not on me yourselves." He can do nothing against the men of Judah, degenerate as they are. He is for them ever; and so every man of God today, governed by the Nazarite principle, will echo the same sentiment and make the widest distinction — not causing separation between brethren and brethren, but between brethren and enemies of the cross of Christ.

But they bind him, do these men of Judah — with "new cords," quite new, made expressly for the occasion. And most surely Satan never lacks for new cords with which to curb the free action of the divine life in the soul of the separated one. Some new rule is made to meet the occasion. One longs to tell the glad tidings, with the sweetness of which his own soul has been filled; but there is a new cord for him; he has not been "ordained." He must not open his mouth till someone has laid hands upon him — he must be bound. Or a few simple believers gather to the one attractive Center, the name of the Lord Jesus, confiding in the promise (Mt. 18:20), and desiring to fulfill His last tender command, "This do in remembrance of Me." There is a new cord for them, for they have no clergyman to give thanks or break the bread, and it is out of order for all others. The Nazarite must be bound.

The word for cords, too, is suggestive. It comes from a root to "intertwine," giving the thought that it is the product of *human* hands. And, indeed, this is exactly what all these rules are. They are not divine; not in God's Word, but entirely of human manufacture, and as soon as God's Word touches them they become as flax.

Would you like to see this fire touch one of these cords? The one that would hinder the free exercise of every gift of grace? "*As every man hath received the gift, so let him*

*minister the same, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" That snaps all these Philistine cords, and sets each one free to use every gift in direct responsibility to the Giver alone.

But Samson dwelling in the cleft of the rock is in his right place, and he needs no jackals now. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon him, and the cords with which his brethren have bound him "become as flax that was burnt with fire." Nor is a weapon lacking. Anything will serve for this purpose when the Spirit of the Lord is working. A fresh jawbone of an ass will suffice. The feebler the instrument the more suited for the end. This is written for our comfort, beloved. The ass may well speak of man as such, and as to him the first necessity is that he must be *out of the way or dead.* The ass has done with the jawbone, then the Spirit of the Lord can pick it up, and use it. It would not be of much service against the Philistines as long as it was in the mouth of a living ass; but let it be entirely controlled by the Nazarite who himself is under the power of the Lord's Spirit and the slaughter of the Philistines is great.

Many intelligent commentators blame Samson severely for taking what they term so unclean an instrument. Says one, "For an Israelite, if there was one thing above another that was defiling it was to *touch a bone.* To touch a dead body was defiling, and an Israelite lost his ceremonial Nazariteship if he did so." This is not the teaching of Scripture. A reference to Numbers 6:6, 7, clearly shows that it is a human dead body that is in view; and in Numbers 19 this is again most clearly specified: whosoever touches the bone *of a man* (v. 16). It would seem certain that when Samson was controlled by the Spirit of the Lord, he would not go dead against the Word of the Lord — this would be impossible. Now death — as far as a man is concerned — evidences, and is the result of, *sin*: "By

one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom. 5); and this is, I judge, what makes it defiling; but this was by no means the case as to the beast. As far as we are told, the brute creation were never intended to be immortal, they had no such link with their Creator. Indeed, they were made "to be taken and destroyed" (2 Pet. 2:12). Nor do I think that the ass has necessarily a bad significance. Did not the Lord Jesus make use of an ass? and exactly the same word is used for it in Zechariah 9:9 as here; and may anything be said against Samson's using it after that?

It is quite true that at times it is, as this same writer says, typical of a strong self-will. The natural man is like "a wild ass' colt." But in such cases quite another word is used. Here it evidently points simply to the feebleness of the instrument used, as contrasted with the results. No one could say Samson owed his victory to the superiority of his weapon. The Lord is ever looking for just such unlikely instruments to use.

We must, however, note one point about this jawbone. It was a fresh, or moist, jawbone — not "new" — the word is quite different to that used for the cords. Wonders can be done with a fresh, moist jawbone. Jawbones are, alas, so very dry today (cf. Ezek. 37:2). There is so little "*freshness*" in them. Plenty of human learning; even at times, plenty of head-knowledge of Scripture. Men have learned much of late years about dispensational truth; but that does not necessarily mean "freshness," moisture, vitality, unction; and no "jawbone" is of much service, apart from this. It must not be a dry, dead bone, it must be simple and fresh. The ass must be dead, but there must be life in the bone.

And now, after the fight, our Samson sings for once in his life, and celebrates his victory.

"With the jawbone of an ass —

*Mass, yea masses —
With a jawbone of an ass
I have slain a thousand men."

And then he throws away the jawbone. He will not keep it. It might become a snare to him. Israel might go a-whoring after it as after Gideon's ephod. It has served his purpose, now let it go — after all it is nothing more than the poor jawbone of a dead ass! Oh that we could learn something from this! It is such a day to exalt the poor, foolish instruments that God, in His goodness, may use. Do not we everywhere hear what a wonderful man is such a man! What marvellous power in the gospel! What beauty of exposition! What magnetism! What a smart man is he! Yes, indeed, just as well might Samson say, "What a powerful jawbone! What a wonderful jawbone! What a magnetic jawbone!" No, no, put the poor jawbone where it belongs, lest it detract from the glory of Him to whom all glory alone is due.

But now our Samson thirsts, and is brought very low. God is doing great things for His servant today, and the suffering him to thirst is one of them, little as he may think it. He cries to the Lord with faith's beautiful argument: "Thou who hast done so much, wilt thou not do much more?" Thou has given deliverance this day and how shall I die of thirst and fall with the hands of the uncircumcised. No, Samson, not till heaven and earth pass away. Waters spring up for faith everywhere, anywhere, even in the *most* unlikely places. Here in the hollow or bruising place, that was in Lehi, waters flow as from the cleft rock, Exodus 17, and Samson drinks — as every Nazarite spirit needs to drink, again and again, after

*The same word, Chamohr, is for "ass" and "heap," so it is a question whether this second line should be translated "heaps" or "asses". Mr. F. W. Grant in the Numerical Bible prefers the latter, and renders "I have made asses of them." I confess I cannot see the advantage of this; indeed it would appear altogether inappropriate, as giving an undignified meaning to "ass," such as only obtains in modern tongues — not in the Scriptures.

every conflict — of the waters from the cleft place, the life-giving streams that come from Christ crucified and risen.

But is there any correspondence in the second step in the path of the Nazarite Samson to the second step in the Nazarite Church, as shows in the letter to Smyrna? Smyrna is the *persecuted* Church, and I have thought that this may possibly be hinted at in the name of the rock that is given us: "Etam," for this means "the lair of ravenous beasts." Surely this was just the locality in which poor, yet rich, Smyrna dwelt, on all sides of her the ravenous wild beasts roared, and she felt their fangs in her flesh; but she is in "the cleft of the rock" for all that — although troubled, too, by degenerate "men of Judah," "they who say they are Jews and are not;" but are in direct league with the Philistines; for they undoubtedly refer to those Judaizers who crept in stealthily into the Church that they might bring it into bondage; delivering it to formalism. Both Nazarite and Church are graciously revived in the "place of *wild beasts*!" His people do not always realize what revival may necessitate.

## Chapter 16

# SAMSON (continued)

Poor Samson maintains his moral elevation but a short time. A strong trend towards the Philistine draws him down from his rock, down even to Gaza, a word meaning "stronghold," and meaning this, surely it may well answer to the world as the place "where Satan's throne is." It was here that the Church in the day of *Pergamos* settled down, as the Lord writes, "I know thy works and where thou dwellest, where Satan's throne is." Alas, Samson is all too faithful a picture of that Church whose testimony upon the earth should have been that of the Nazarite, a heart fully satisfied with the all-sufficiency of Christ, and with nothing else. Another story was told in the day of Pergamos. Then, with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, the days of persecution — of the wild beasts of Etam, as we saw in our last paper — were passed, and the Church and the world became one in a guilty embrace. The world dropped her name, and became the *Christian* world. The Church may have retained the name, but became the *world's* Church, and soon she was sound asleep, and the dark hours of night passed on.

For now come on, in very deed, the Dark Ages, and Pergamos glides into Thyatira with no strongly defined boundary that we can now see for the darkness covers all. But at least, as the Nazarite Samson was in Gaza the very stronghold of Philistines, so the Church was, all through this time, in the very stronghold of that hybrid ecclesiasticism

which answers to the Philistine, and is found in its essence in Rome.

But let us look a little closer at this woman, this second ensnarer of Samson. She is unnamed, except that she is plainly called a "*harlot;*" and can this be without significance? Do we not recognize her in "that woman *Jezebel who seduces the Lord's servants to commit fornication*" (Rev. 2:20); and still later, when she is in full development, do we not see her again in the same impure woman, only under another name, which is now plainly written upon her forehead, "*Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth*" (Rev. 17:5). Oh, most surely, beloved reader, we have in this history of Samson a perfect, if sorrowful, picture of the history of the Church — God's true Church, now in guilty alliance with the church-world, as she was all through the dark ages of Pergamos and Thyatira, whilst in this Philistine harlot we see the world-church itself with its pretensions to those possessions that belong alone to faith. The Philistines compass him in, lay wait for him in the gate of the city, and are filled with complacent assurance that nevermore will the Nazarite trouble them, they have him now securely. They can well afford to wait and kill him by the morning light.

And it does certainly look as if this confidence were not unjustified; Samson seems lost beyond hope; and so did the Church of Christ in the day of Thyatira. Who could have hoped for any further testimony to the all-sufficiency of Christ? Masses, sacraments, penances, confessions, indulgences and a crowd of *Philistine abominations,* all based on man's power and goodness, seemed to have silenced, or almost silenced, the voice of divine testimony forever.

But at midnight Samson arose, tore away the gates and posts, and bore them to the top of a hill before Hebron. What

mighty power! How perfect a picture of the recovered Nazarite energy at the awakening of the Church, and her deliverance from the gates and bars of Philistinism at what is called the Reformation. All the gates and bars of the Philistines could not keep that reawakened energy in, and if Samson were on the top of the mountain that is before Hebron, the Church of God is seen, in Philadelphia, surely in a condition of moral elevation that the physical fact may well figure, and when we remember that the word "Hebron" signifies "*communion*," "*association*," "*fellowship*," the correspondence with that state of the Church significantly called "*Brotherly Love*" is certainly not weakened, to say the least.

Would that he — would that she, the Church, could have stayed there. The stay of both, I fear, was very short at this happy spot, for the foolish Samson is yet to figure the still more foolish Church, in retracing his steps for the last time to the Philistine land, and soon he is again in Gaza, only now as a miserable captive, whom death alone is to release.

For again he loves "a woman in the valley of Sorek named Delilah;" and as she is to play a most important part in his fortunes, we must consider her as carefully as we can. Her names means "weak," "exhausted," whilst "Sorek," her dwelling place, is the very word used in Isaiah 5:2 and there translated "*choicest vine*." I believe she figures the ecclesiastical world in the present day, fully identified with this world and all its pleasures, such as the vine "Sorek" surely speaks of. Look at her well, my dear reader. Be quite sure as to her identity, and if the professing worldly Church of the day is not living in pleasure, is not a "lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God," than refuse my interpretation and application as altogether false. There is not an eye that will scan these lines but that *knows* it is exactly true. We have

reached the close of the Nazarite Samson's life on earth — we have reached the close of the Church's time of testimony on earth, and we are living even now in the days of Delilah of Sorek!

But even yet we have not touched the significance of her own name, "exhausted," "pining away." It is beautifully and perfectly significant. Have you never read (1 Jn. 2:17), "The world *passeth away*"? What is that but her name, Delilah? Oh, but she is a very Jezebel; she will "paint her eyes and tire her head" (2 Ki. 9:30) till one would think her quite young and attractive; but look at her in a *true light* — God's light — not the artificial glare that she herself loves to provide, and you will see she is very old and "*passing away*." Her name is "Delilah." Is she not well named?

And Samson loves her, as the Nazarite today is attracted by the thoroughly religious respectable world. And oh, my reader, if you have ever seen any beauty in Christ, any divine loveliness in the gospel that hung you helplessly on His love; if you thus have ever taken Him for your *all*; then see in this false love the gravest danger that besets you now. I do not suppose that you are in any immediate danger of a literal impurity such as that which ensnared Samson. All these things are *types*, and must therefore typify something spiritual, and, little as you may think it, if you dally with any form of carnal religiousness that makes much of man in the flesh, and little of divine grace, much of the present world and little of our Father's home, much of man's power and little of Christ's cross, though it may look as fair as Delilah to Samson, you, even you, are really in the same danger as was he.

The lords of the Philistines avail themselves quickly of his infatuation, only now they wish to get at the root of the matter — they will learn the secret of his strength and rob him

of it. They promise Delilah a reward of 1,100 pieces of silver from each of them, or 5,500 in all, for these lords represented the five cities, Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron.*

Delilah willingly lends herself to their wishes (for is she not Philistine, too?) and begs Samson to tell her the secrets of his strength, and what would avail to bind him. He lies to her. "If they bind me with seven moist cords that were never dried, then shall I be weak and be as another man." She tried it, and cries, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." He breaks the cords "as tow is broken when it toucheth the fire."

Not discouraged, she tries again, and again he lies. "If they bind me with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak and be as another man." Philistine ropes are easily obtained, and she binds Samson with them. He breaks them like a thread.

Reproaching him with mocking her, once again she would

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* The following extract from "The Numerical Bible," by F. W. Grant, may be of interest to my readers:

"The five cities of the Philistines give us in growing intensity their menace to Israel. *Gasa*, the 'strong,' to this day a greater city than Jerusalem. It is power, above all, that Rome seeks, — earthly power, by whatever means acquired, and her spiritual power she uses for temporal aggrandizement. 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow,' is her language; and to secure this she is content to be a harlot with the kings of the earth (Rev. 17).

"Ashdod, the 'spoiler,' shows us how she sustains and increases her strength. She may well be reckoned as a Canaanite (merchant) who puts a tariff on sin itself, and shamefully sells every gift of God for money.

"Ashkelon, the 'fire of infamy,' shows us next the lightest of her weapons against those that resist her sway. Curses, reproach of heresy, railings of all kinds, she has ever dealt in, blasting the good name of all she dare attack in this way. It is a necessity laid upon her to destroy the character of those whom she dooms to more serious penalties. And — Gath, the 'winepress,' goes on to this. It is used in Scripture for the infliction of wrath, even divine wrath (Rev. 14:19, 20; 19:15); and this is what Rome feigns her own to be. Finally — Ekron, 'rooting out,' carries this on to complete extirpation of all that differ from her."

I would only add to this that I am forced to the conviction that Philistinism has a much wider application than to the Church of Rome, although this terrible system is assuredly its most definite expression, but is the mother of others, whose features do not lack the marks of their parentage.

learn how he may be rendered helpless. And now he treads still further on dangerous ground, for his answer is, "If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web."

He sleeps, and as he sleeps she weaves the seven locks of his long hair with her loom, and fastens it with a pin to the beam. Gradually has he approached the truth. In his first answer there is a hint of it in the number seven. He tells her there is a seven, an element of divine perfection, in the answer to her question. It points to his seven locks. In the second answer he adds that the ropes must "*never have been used.*" Like his hair on which no razor had ever come, there is an element of complete separation, and now he plainly names his hair, as having in it, in some way, the secret of his strength. Thus, his three answers put together would read: The secret of my strength lies in "seven," "untouched," "locks of hair."

See him then connected closely with *her* work. Oh, my dear fellow believer, what a picture filled with solemn warning have we here! It is easily interpreted. The world, the fair-seeming religious world, gets the Nazarite interested in her work, weaves his power in with it, mixes him up with it. Have we never seen a true Nazarite — a hidden one, with some secret power — and the ecclesiastical world enticing him to share her work? He is seen interested in schemes that deny the basal truths of the gospel, fair as they may look. He speaks on the same platforms, and for the same aims, as infidels, Unitarians, Buddhists and Christ-rejecting Jews, the Delilah world soothing him the while with her praises for his "large-hearted liberality!" Do not for one moment imagine that the spirit figured here by Samson with his hair interwoven in Delilah's work is what we are accustomed to call wicked. Not literal impurity, nor durnkenness, nor profanity as men speak are in view. No, the Philistine was not a Moabite; nor must we look for anything like infidelity, for the Philistine was no

Amorite, either; quite the opposite. It is a most religious spirit. You will find it in such movements as "The Parliament of Religions." You will find it on temperance platforms; in associations for united philanthropic or political work, aye, even in church-membership, so often substituted for Christ-membership, Samson would have felt no attraction to a foul, ugly form or face, nor will the Nazarite, or saint of today, be drawn from his true place by any moral or spiritual hideousness. To win *him* from the truth, or the truth from him, a fair show must be on the surface; but underneath there will be a very real denial of the necessity for, and the unrivaled virtue of, the death of God's dear Son on Calvary. I have given above only some of the many Philistine webs with which the religiousness of this day loves to intertwine the holy crown of the saint of God; a spirit sensitive of the glory of the cross is able to discern them, and alone is able.

For again it is certain that whilst Rome undoubtedly is the fullest expression of Philistinism, it is a serious mistake and one likely to throw us into grave danger, if we assume that it is confined to this, or that we may not discover it a good deal nearer to us than Rome. On this account I have felt the need of constantly remembering that these individuals of old are figures of what is in the *spiritual world*; spiritual principles that govern today for good or evil. Samson is thus the *spirit of holy separation to God*. The Philistine is the *spirit* of religiousness that governs men in the flesh apart from God, or dependence on Him.

But once more Delilah awakens him with her cry, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson," and once more, for the last time he is free, for still is he hidden by his long hair.

Yes, and if we may make this practical to ourselves, I am assured that often the spirit of the child of God is aroused and

awakened by some clear evidence of Philistine hospitality. How comfortable do you suppose such a one is in association with, let us say, for example, the politics of earth? His own motive may be pure, and generally is, at least at first, but his associates are men of the world, to whom his Lord and Savior is unknown. They are banded together for what appears such an excellent work — to purify the world, even *in its* distance and separation from God. But ever and again his spirit shrinks from the association, startled by some distinct evidence of enmity to the cross of Christ. It is the cry, "the Philistines be upon thee, Samson;" a test to see how securely he is bound. For a moment he is free; but if he steps not entirely outside of such associations, he, as Samson returning to his ensnarer, speeds on to captivity, blindness and (the end of his testimony for Christ) death.

Here is what indeed makes days worth calling "difficult" (2 Tim. 3). Open hostility is plain, simple and clear. We can see it, and know fully what we may expect from it; but when our enemy comes with every religious attraction, nothing irreligious, nothing repulsive, nothing startling, kisses us, and soothes to sleep — ah there is "difficulty" indeed. Beloved reader, would that my pen could convey to you the intensity of my conviction that it is exactly this that is the danger that besets you and me just this very day. Awake, oh sleeper, you that are at ease and fancy all is going well, awake, oh awake, for when the professing Church is on Delilah's lap, it is indeed the time to cry aloud to every individual that has an ear to hear (as you have, my dear reader), to AWAKE.

We left our Nazarite Samson escaping from the snares of Delilah for the last time, carrying away with him "the pin of the beam and the web." For every saint who trifles with this world, fair and religious as it may and does now appear, there always comes a "last time." If he loves "the world and the

things that are in the world," sooner or later she will discover the secret of his strength, and rob him of it. That this may not be true of His heavenly people, the Lord has given them this picture of Samson, who in all these ways stands out on the divine page as a lighthouse beacon warning us of the danger of the rocks on which he suffered shipwreck.

I almost shrink from going on with this narrative so important do I recognize a scriptural interpretation to be, so direct its application to the present hour — the last hour — so weighty the responsibility resting on any who would attempt it; and, yet, knowing something of the goodness and grace of the One Interpreter — "the One among a thousand" (Job 33:23).

> "Not to attempt it, arduous as I deem
> The labor were a task more arduous still."

For if my application of Samson's path of short-lived periods of faithfulness, with long lapses constantly increasing in seriousness, to the path of that Church which was, above all called to give a Nazarite testimony to the all-sufficiency of her absent Lord, is justified; then, as we have traced their correspondence down to the last times of each, are we now about to consider the means by which the Church is seduced to the same sad state of humiliation as of Samson of old.

Delilah continues to press him sorely. "She pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death." What a picture of anything that is admitted into the heart's affections that is not of the Father! The worldly Christian never has any true rest; he loves what is never weary of wearying. His peace is broken, for it is only "the mind of the Spirit," who would win us away from the world, that "is life and peace" (Rom. 8). So at last, worn out, Samson tells all his heart to her who had three times shown

how she would use him, if she only knew how to afflict him. He tells his secret to the enemy, who never could have discovered it for herself, for who would have thought that that long hair, clear evidence of weakness, even of womanly weakness, was after all where his strength lay — that his strength was in weakness.

She clearly recognizes that she has the secret at last; and sends for those lords of the Philistines that had been so often disappointed. They come, with the rewards of unrighteousness — wages that the prince of this world can still give to his servants, in their hands. Great wealth is the portion of the Philistine.

And now mark her subtle ways, and learn how, dear redeemed saint of God, thou too shalt lose all thy power for testimony, if thou art not watchful. Can we emphasize too strongly this lesson for ourselves personally. His strength was in the locks that hid him. Thy only strength is in being hidden. If the world in its fair friendly show, as being quite respectable and religious, can only steal away thy hair — thy *heart from dependence on Christ* — thy strength goes from thee, and thy liberty is gone forever!

Do you remember that solemn word to the church in Philadelphia, "Let no one take thy crown." What does it mean? I used to think, as all commentators as far as I am aware have taught, that it refers solely to the future reward. Let no one take away from thee thy reward, the crown that awaits thee. Nor do I deny that there may be some such application;* but I am now fully persuaded that in this church in Philadelphia we have the last true Nazarite testimony of the Church of God on earth. She is such, because attracted by the beauty and love of the "Holy and True." She is the Nazarite *crowned.* She has *even now* a crown. If she had no crown,

*Yet is not the future blessing always in the promised reward to the overcomer?

surely no one could take from her what she had not. What is that crown? It is again her *long hair* the sense of her own weakness and nothingness, of her Lord's all-sufficiency. Let that be gone, then her Nazariteship is lost and the result is exactly the same in the Church's as in Samson's case. She too becomes "blind, poor, naked, wretched and miserable."

But is the long hair of Nazareth called his crown? That is exactly what it is called, although our A. V. hides this, His very name of Nazarite is derived from it. It may be found in verse 7 of Numbers 6, "Because the crown (Heb. nehzer) of his God is upon his head." Nor have the translators always refrained from so rendering it, for turn to Leviticas 21:12, which is really a perfectly parallel passage, and we have: "for the *crown* (nehzer) of the anointing oil of His God is upon him."

Beloved, is it not clear that as Samson, the last Nazarite testimony of that day, lost his crown; so the Church in its last Nazarite testimony of this day is in exactly the same danger; and do not the warning words, "Let no one take thy crown," come now with a new force of personal warning to us from the Lord who loves us. Alas, as Samson lost it, so does the Church.

Let us return to Samson. He has told out his secret to the enemy. The fair attractive foe has at length learned how she may afflict him. And today, by all the spreading out before the *religious world* of the precious truths that can only be truly held by faith — the making popular what were the gracious revealings of God's love to those separate from the world, I am greatly afraid that the Philistine has discovered the secret of the Church's strength and has robbed her of it.

Delilah first puts him to sleep. She knows well that she can do nothing with him till he *is* asleep, and she knows well too

the arts to employ in order to lull him to sleep. It must be "upon her knees," the place of most familiar affection (Isa. 56:12). She has no evil intent! Impossible! See how she loves him. She cares only for his comfort. "Sleep, Samson, sleep!" Oh, how true, how true to the very life now — the world now *loves* the Church! Would not have her tread the thorny road her Bridegroom went. Would have her rest, even here, from her weary pilgrimage. Why so wakeful? Why so watchful, oh, fair Church, thou art in an enemy's country no longer — the times have changed, the world is quite Christian now. "Oh, sleep, fair Church, sleep."

And as sure as Samson slept, the Church has, like those virgins that represent her, "slumbered and slept." Next, "she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head, and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him."

Delilah's act is simple enough, but how shall we interpret it as to the Nazarite today? It is equally simple. Having soothed the watchful Church to sleep, the "church-going world" proceeds to take away the crown of Nazariteship. She uncovers him — exposes him. Hitherto he has been hidden, now he is seen. Hitherto weakness is all that has been seen in him, with some strange, unknown power which has been displayed in that weakness. Now there is no longer any confessed weakness. That is gone. In the place of it is self-confidence that the world can well understand. She sees through him now. There is *no longer a secret!*

Then she awakens him; and he, poor man, "wist not that the Lord was departed from him." And how many an individual Nazarite since then, after walking a path of usefulness, in self-forgetful glorying only in the Lord, has been taken up by the respectable Philistine ecclesiasticism of

the day, seduced from his dependence, *made prominent*, and his testimony to the power and resurrection of Jesus — ruined!

"He wist not." No, such an one never does, and so the Spirit speaks to the last state of the Church — with *her* crown gone. "Thou knowest not." And that is the present day Church that a little while ago was Philadelphia, "brotherly love." Have we ears to hear?

I know not, beloved reader, where you stand ecclesiastically; but wherever you are, I do know that if you have thoughts that exalt you above your brethren; that prevent your obedience to Philippians 2: "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves," it is the Philistines' razor above your head. That razor is active enough just now. Some dear saints are claiming to be peculiarly "*consecrated*" above others; some have got into another class, or sphere, together, and are *sealed with the Spirit*, while the mass of God's children are unsealed "have not the Spirit of Christ" so "are none of His"! Some assure us that they are *filled with the Spirit*, in contrast with other comparatively carnal saints; some are so faithful and watchful as alone to be entitled to good hope to meet the Lord in the air; some have discovered that they, apart from their brethren, are the one Church of God, etc., some one way, some another; but in every case it is *themselves* of whom they speak; *they* are prominent, and in some superiority over their brethren; the razor is doing its work, and is exposing them; they lose their crown. It is no longer the unrivalled beauty of their Savior-Lord that is their joy. No longer their own poverty, ignorance, foolishness and weakness that is gloried in, because these set off His love and power. I appeal to you, has not the Philistine's razor done much shaving in these days?

Well, the Philistines take poor Samson, put out his eyes, bind him with fetters of brass, and he grinds in the prisonhouse. Consider him well. Is he not wretched? Is he not miserable? And poor — what has he left now? And blind? Yes, the Philistines have dug out his eyes. And naked, with his covering locks gone? But *that is what the Lord says is exactly the last state of the Church!* Is not the correspondence startling — enough to awaken us?

But where shall we find what answers to Samson in this case today?

Not very long ago, there was a gracious revival with every characteristic of the Spirit's work, whereby a remnant of the Lord's people on earth were confessing their nothingness, and rejoicing in the loveliness and power of their Lord. With hearts filled only with His beauty, they could see it in each other; and they resented anything that would separate them from fellow-saints. Thus they were gathered out of what divided them, in lowly dependence, two or three here and there, to His Name; for absolute dependence is the very essence of this term, "gathered to My Name" (Mt. 18). And this was their *crown*. Their little strength lay in their confessed weakness. They assumed not to be separate from their beloved brethren anywhere. Any to whom Jesus their Lord was dear, was dear to them, and welcomed to *their* hearts since they had been welcomed to His; hence the name that Scripture ever applies to such a condition: "Philadelphia," *Brotherly-Love*.

But time passed, and soon alas the enemy's work is again seen. How is that known but in contrast to that of the Spirit of God by its constant trend to exalt poor man? So now, it is the glories of "*The Church*" they sing, and they only are the Church. It is restored in them at last. The precious world-

separating truths God gave His people, are now taken and made to glorify *them*, and to separate them from their brethren. But they are not as separate from the world as of old. They love it better, have a place in it. The Philistine has cut off their hair, made something of them; dug out their eyes, so that they no longer see the glories of their Lord, or His overwhelming attraction in each other, and they fly apart. The Philistine has made them grind for his benefit only; and building up something on the earth, they toil for time, not eternity.

My reader, is this very far from any one of us? It is quite the fashion to pass all this over to someone else. Not one will admit that *he* has any connection with that terrible name of reproach, Laodicea. Well, in that case, none will hear His voice — not one. None will say, "Yea, Lord, I hear Thee; I know Thy voice; I have been a fool; I have turned from Thee; I have seen glories elsewhere that eclipsed Thy beauty. Oh, my Lord, I need Thee. Never did I need Thee more. Come in, my Savior-Lord, come in. Anoint these poor sightless eyes with that salve Thou only hast. Bid me see again no beauty but in Thee. Let me drop the tinsel of earth, and grasp my own fine gold in Thee."

Is there to be none, my dear reader? Not one to own to the truth? Not one to take it home? Not one to give the Lord a supper His Soul loves? Not one who knows and will choose the good part of letting Him bless? Not one then to have fulfilled the promise "I will grant unto him to sit with me in my throne." I know well many a heart, as it reads this, will join with the poor writer and say: "If no one else, then let me but find my place at Thy Feet, abide there only, in confessed absolute *need*, till Thou shalt come."

It is but little more we need say of poor Samson. Dear to us he has become for the lessons he has given us, and we are

thankful to hear that the enemy could not touch his *life*. No, he never can, God be praised. That is at least secure, and since his life was saved, it begins to show itself again as a hidden life by hiding him once more. "The hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven." Why does his hair grow? Samson "wists" now, and no longer says "I will go out and *shake myself* as at other times." He knows just the condition he is in; and in that last cry of *his*, he owns that he is helpless — Oh, happy Samson! Thy strength is back in thy weakness, and thy sight too shall come, although this figure cannot express it. Another confessor may be looked at for this, who is also exactly as Samson with his hair growing. See Bartimeus as he stands, with his garment thrown away, before the Lord Jesus, he is a blind, naked beggar, and thus also "poor, and blind, and naked, and wretched and miserable." But Bartimeus *wists* it, and blessed man in confessing it and counting on the depth of Christ's love, he gave the Lord much refreshment — a supper, we may say — in the closing days of His earthly walk — that last walk to the cross at Jerusalem; and soon he strikes a bargain in which he *gives* only need and confidence, and *gets* all — sight and joy.

Are we to miss this by saying others may be in Loadicea, but not we; *we* are the only true Philadelphian testimony left!

I know well "Philadelphia goes on to the end," as the common saying is. So does Thyatira (Roman Catholicism); and ever is there a beloved, if small, remnant in her; but are *we* in Thyatira? Another condition comes, and Thyatira, as the last characteristic testimony of the church, passes. Out of her comes Sardis (Protestantism); and in Sardis, too, to the end, is a remnant who have not defiled their garments; are *we* in Sardis? And Philadelphia (those who love the brethren) comes out of Sardis. Where does Laodicea (the claims of the first man) come from, if not from Philadelphia? When

brethren evidenced no longer love as *brethren*, but in mutual separation from each other built up anew ecclesiastical systems; each necessarily with its lofty pretension to being the only one true expression of the Church of God on earth, did not "Philadelphia," in a sense, give way to Laodicea; and is not that the present condition of things outside of the "Roman" and "Protestant" churches? Who is nearest the lowly Philadelphia? He who claims to *be* this, or he who would hear and take home the Lord's voice to the last state of the Church? My conviction is that, in the last case, we may possibly find "the hair beginning to grow again."

See Samson's last moments. He is in the lowest depth of humiliation, "making sport" for the uncircumcised. They are filled with exulting merriment at his state. Is Samson even in this a picture? Will it ever come to this; *has* it come to this in this day of heavenly gathering? When the poor Church has lost her place, her sight, her liberty, and universal confusion bespeaks her captivity, does not the dominant ecclesiasticism of this very hour make merry over her? Most surely it does. But this is just before the end.

He is between the pillars, and cries to Jehovah. Jehovah evidently returns to him. Oh, blessed be God; His departure is never final from His own, although restoration may be evidenced only at the last moment. He bows himself, and is involved with the foe in one tremendous ruin; but this is *victory* for him — *victory even in departing*. He is buried in the place of his childhood were the Spirit of the Lord began to move him, between Zorah and Eshtaol — he is restored at last.

Let us have one close personal word together, dear reader: How art thou spending thy one little life? It is speeding fast. Wilt thou be content to "grind" for the world, satisfied if at the last moment thy Sun bursts through thy cloudy day, and

once more thy soul is flooded with His light just before departure? How often is this the case. A comparatively wasted life, and a death-bed testimony to satisfy the solicitude of friends that at least all ends well for eternity — will this content thee? May it not be. Thou art a lamp that God has lighted; hide not that light under the "bushel" of commercialism (gain) or the "bed" of self-pleasing (pleasure). "Awake thou that sleepest"; even on the world's knees, "arise from among the *dead*, and Christ shall shine upon thee," and as reflecting His light only shalt thou give light.

And what as to the Church? Is there anything in Samson's end that may in some shadowy way anticipate her own? She is not to perish. The gates of hades shall not prevail against her, so that in this there must be contrasts.

I speak with diffidence, certainly without dogmatism; but, in the light of other Scriptures, we may possibly see some parallel as well as contrasts. None can reasonably doubt but that we are living very close to the end, and as Samson's was the last divine intervention in this book, so we need not expect any further *general* revival, such as has occurred again and again in the Church's history, as in that of the book we have so long considered together. We may also learn that the last testimony is, as the Nazarite's, individual, "If *any* one hear my voice," and such testimony will be ever to the end. But further, in the hour of Christendom's loudest boasting over her own glorious state, and the wretched condition of His people: the Church, the true Church, the Bride, shall depart in victory, caught up to meet Him in the air; and, in her departing, the Lord shall spue out of His mouth the professing thing left — it shall be an awful ruin.

## THE QUESTION.

He drinks no wine! No vine of earth
  Can claim t'inspire his singing.
Yet mark his constant holy mirth,
  As though his soul were winging
    Her homeward way, 'mid sunbeams bright;
    Instead of our sad downward flight
    Through mirky clouds to endless night —
    What secret has this Nazarite?

His head unshorn; — his woman-hair
  Speak weakness, shame, and hiding;
Yet lion, as t'were kid, he'll tear,
  The strongest power deriding.
    A thousand foes he'll put to flight;
    With ass' jaw prevail in fight;
    Almighty strength! Resistless might!
    What secret has this Nazarite?

This old-creation scene, though fair,
  Is filled with dead and dying.
*He* seems to breathe another air,
  The power of death defying.
    The death within us doth unite
    Our souls to this pervading blight.
    His head still crowned — his garments white!
    What secret has this Nazarite?

## THE REPLY

The secret is it that you ask
  Of joy, strength, elevation?
To answer is an easy task;

One word gives explanation —
Jesus alone, my soul's delight;
Jesus alone, my strength, my might;
Jesus, at new creation's height,
Alone can keep the Nazarite.

I too was sad; or only forced,
As crackling thorns, my laughter;
When lo, the lovliest Person crossed
My path — Enough! Thereafter
No wine could "move itself aright"
To vie with Love whose depth and height
And sweetness is my heart's delight —
*This* secret has the Nazarite.

I was, and am indeed still, weak;
But 'tis the same sweet story;
That Love, whereof I love to speak,
Hath made that shame my glory.
My hair unshorn but hides from sight
All that I was, — my wretched plight.
Whilst now my Savior's grace and might
Suffice a helpless Nazarite.

Oh, dream not that I've not been bound,
Or count myself thy better.
'Tis but that I at last have found
One who has snapped my fetter.
He wound His arms about me quite:
Stood in my place, where God *must* smite:
Thus died — then took to glory bright
The heart of His poor Nazarite.

And when some death-defiling sin
  Comes suddenly across me,
My course I must again begin;
  The days before are lost me.
    Dost think I am discouraged quite?
    Where can I turn? *His* love more bright,
    Like one clear star on stormy night,
    Guides ever *home* His Nazarite!

## Chapter 17

# PRIESTHOOD: FALSE AND TRUE

Thus far, dear reader, have we been led along together, through the pages of this book so divinely interesting, since it shows in a series of pictures the Church's history from beginning to end. They have been sad, pathetic pictures of ever-growing degeneracy, as well as constant reminders of the kindness and long-suffering goodness that lingered so long over this beloved people; a shadow of the long suffering that has lingered over the church, as God's responsible witness upon earth but in both cases this has an end.

We now come to the third, last, and very distinct division of the book. It is quite of another character. It is no more the external condition of the people as a whole that is spoken of as in the sad refrain, "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord;" no longer a judge raised up, and yet it reveals to us in a peculiarly graphic way the state of affairs in Israel all through the time of the Judges. The two incidents that it relates must have occurred chronologically much earlier; for the emigration of Dan is mentioned in Joshua 19:47, whilst Phinehas, who stood before the ark in the days of the second, Judges 20:28, was a grown man in the time of Moses (Num. 25). But morally they have their place at the end, as summing up the whole condition of things in Israel, and giving us the hidden roots of her trouble, first Godward and then manward, for this is clearly the bearing of the two respectively. In the first, we see the tie with God loosened,

and, as a consequence, in the second, the ties that bound them together dissolved. If God be lost; if dependence on Him be gone if He as the one Object of reverence, obedience, fear; — the one winsome, lovely Attraction to the heart, be lost sight of, men cannot walk together in peace and love; for, alas, they are now "hateful and hating one another," and as soon as they "walk as men" in any dispensation and in any sphere — social, political, ecclesiastical — there are divisions among them (1 Cor. 1-3), contesting parties, cliques, sects. This is a weighty truth. Anarchy will always result in God being denied as was so cruelly evidenced in the French Revolution, and shall be in a wider sphere and greater intensity again.

Ephraim is significantly the scene in both cases. Ephraim who speaks by the name of Fruitfulness. Here must the Lord look for fruit if anywhere. Here is the vine, here the fig tree; what kind of grapes and figs do they yield? "Wild grapes" (Isa. 5) and "very naughty figs" indeed (Jer. 24). No fruit for their divine Husbandman; even as long afterwards He, in other guise, yet the very same, came to that same fig tree, Israel (Mk. 11), which proclaimed in its leafage much pretension to fruit, yet left its God hungry still.

For here is Micah, ever proclaiming also by his name "*who is as Jehovah?*" but proclaiming it in no other way. It is a perfect representative name for Israel; she was to be Jehovah's witness to His supremacy as the one true God. "Thus saith Jehovah, Ye are my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Yea; there is no God; I know not any" (Isa. 44:8). Thus Israel was to be a Micah in the earth, crying ever "Who is like Jehovah"; and yet it is just Micah who has a house full of false gods!

Well it is very easy to condemn others; but is there no condemnation in this of the last witness, the Church? She was to be the witness of the resurrection from among the dead of

Jesus, the Son of God; with all that this necessitates, the utter hopelessness of man in the flesh, the perfect justification and everlasting acceptance in God's favor of every believer, her own distinctly heavenly calling, character and hopes; that she is not of this world, and only waits for her Lord and Bridegroom to call her to Himself. Her whole testimony was to be "Who is like my Lord Jesus, the Bridegroom of my heart?"

Now look around, my reader, and what do you see? The hand of that professing Church is warmly clasping the hand of the world still red with the blood of Christ! whilst in her "religion," as she calls it, she is back again at the burning mount and the mystic veil, putting herself under the law, as if the cross of Christ had not forever proved man utterly without strength and ungodly. By every word she denies her name "Ecclesia," "the called-out."

But let the sword come a little closer. "Who is like my Lord Jesus?" is what every Christian says by his name of Christian. "He is the 'altogether lovely,' the winner of my heart, the quencher of my thirst, so that indeed I prove His word true; and 'never thirst' for any waters of earth" (Jn. 4:14). Yet, even whilst his name says this, he drinks of the muddy pools of this world's pleasures, is attracted by its glittering show, and in every way denies his name. Oh, that name and life might correspond.

As to Micah, our narrative opens with a wonderful, simple exposure. Here are he and his mother speaking together in the most natural, unconcerned way about theft, and cursing, and idolatry. Micah fears not to steal his mother's 1,100 pieces of silver; but he fears the curse. Superstition is always as strong as the fear of God is weak. In proportion to the lack of the one is the strength of the other. Then the silly mother, getting

her silver back, blesses her thieving and unrepentant son — the same mouth uttering, equally vainly, blessings and curses (Jas. 3). Next she herself calmly assures him that she had "wholly dedicated the silver unto Jehovah to make a graven image and a molten image." No one would surely imagine that Jehovah had ever said, "Thou shalt make no graven image" (Ex. 20). This simple, clear, fundamental command had been utterly lost. Tradition had obliterated God's truth. Evidently it was at this time considered an evidence of peculiar piety to have a graven image. Conscience fully approved it. They had a quiet conscience *because* idolators! Their conscience would have accused them had they not been idolators! Of what value is a conscience when separated from God's revelation? It is exactly the same today. The enemy has succeeded in actually getting man's conscience on his side. Thousands quiet their conscience by faithful attendance at an idolatrous institution termed "The Mass"; while if they listened to or read the pure word of God their *conscience* would accuse them of disobedience to their "church"! It is Satan's masterpiece when he can actually get man's conscience on his side; and this it is, when it is subject to any ecclesiasticism and not to God direct. Nor need we go as far as Rome for illustrations of this; it is much nearer home.

But Micah is getting on finely. He has everything decent and in order; a house of gods, an ephod and teraphim; all he lacks is a priest. Well as to this, he must just do the best he can, and so he consecrates one of his own sons for a priest. It is not quite as it should be, but he is *doing his best*. The next verse gives us a word of explanation. "In those days there was no king in Israel; but every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

I would look a little closer at this, since it has become a kind of weapon with which Christians thrust at each other.

On all sides with the utmost complacency true children of one Father adopt "the last verse of the Book of Judges" to convict each other of evil, never *themselves*. Nor will anything save us from this thrust except doing what is right in *each other's eyes*. But amid a thousand contending sects and parties how is this possible? It is impossible. We must be content to bear the reproach, whilst in humiliation before God and self-judgment seeking that it be not justified.

But as to the term itself; it is apparently the lack of a king, some supreme authority that shall bring all to one mind, that led to these disgraceful scenes. If they only had a king! But had they not? Was not Jehovah their king? Surely He was, and when a little later they insisted on having a human king like all the nations round about, He says, "They have rejected Me, that I should reign over them."

Where, then, is our One Authority which, truly recognized, would keep the Lord's people walking together in a holy path? There need be no hesitation in answering: The Lord Jesus Christ, as seen in God's Word by the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit. Occupied with Him we shall not put out of place or proportion any inferior truth, so as to insist on uniformity in every point as necessary to Christian fellowship. He will unite, in a true unity, all His, who still may not be able to see eye to eye as to many other things; nor should we throw these words about "doing right in their own eyes" at each other on account of these differences; they will be reserved for their true application to the religious assumptions and inventions of the "first man."

But now we come to a great reformation in Micah's household. He sees a kind providence at work in his behalf; for a Levite, wandering from his own city in Judah, comes to his door, and he at once hires him for his priest, giving him

board, lodging, clothing, and ten shekels of silver a year. Micah is now filled with complacent assurance, and almost ludicrously congratulates himself that now Jehovah will surely do him good, seeing that he has a Levite for his priest. It is the same strange reasoning: Seeing I have for my priest one whom Jehovah forbids to be that.

What is the root of the trouble? God's Word has lost its place and power. It is exactly the same today. A thousand abominations are done to Jehovah, forbidden by Jehovah. As long as all kinds of wickedness is done "religiously," in and for the church, to help the Lord's work out of its financial difficulties, everything is sanctified.

But there is I think an interesting parallel between these two priests of Micah and what has taken place in the professed church of Christ on earth. The history of this, too, may be divided into two parts — first, a long period of degeneracy, with her increasing claims of *sacerdotalism*; and then at the Reformation, a new start, which again more rapidly degenerates, only on opposite lines. Now, as in Micah's case, the priesthood corresponds to these two periods. First Micah is indifferent to the tribe from which his priest comes; he appoints his own son, who was just a convenient substitute, and who has not the slightest pretension to the priesthood by birth, or tribe, or family, or anything; his only claim rested on his being "ordained." But after awhile there is quite a reformation, and now he has a real live Levite for his priest, one who was of the tribe divinely set apart for the *service* of the tabernacle (Num. 3:7). Surely all will go well with him now. Well so it was: First the church which headed up in Rome made these priests who were not even Levites, not even *ministers* of the Word, had no pretension to any connection with the true Tabernacle (Heb. 8). The Church of Rome simply ordains "one of her sons" priest; as long as he is "one

of her sons," that is quite qualification enough. But there is a Reformation, and Protestantism distinctly improves on this. The Protestant must have a Levite for his priest; one whom God Himself has set apart for *ministry* or service. But like Micah, he takes a true Levite and makes him into a *false* priest; a true minister — one whose place and privilege it is to *serve* — and spoils him by putting him into a place of superiority over his brethren; and then he complacently says: "Surely now the Lord will do me good seeing I have a Levit to be my priest."

The basis of the whole thing is utterly contrary to God's order. It is as unwarrantable an assumption in one case as the other. We have but One High Priest over the House of God, who is now sitting, since His work is forever accomplished, at "the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens," "who is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Now *that* is true, *effective* priesthood, maintaining every single individual connected with it in unbroken relationship with God. How refreshing to turn from the empty pretentions of man to the divine Reality. Our High Priest had indeed "somewhat to offer" — a sacrifice that has availed to put away all the sins of His people — past, present and future — forever; so that never more shall there be the slightest hindrance to their approach to God. They have "boldness" to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; the greater their boldness the greater the honor they give to that precious blood on which it is based. And this is the force of the word "making intercession" (Heb. 7). We, with our wretched distrust of God's disposition to us, put our own interpretation on this, and conceive of God — holy, austere, judicial — only prevented from punishing us by the constant appeals of His Son in our behalf. Oh, no, no. God Himself

loves and only wants to bless His children; but, as they still have sin within them, His hands would be tied; his holiness would necessitate His face being turned away; but at His right hand sits His beloved Son, and the one sacrifice of that Son, His own blood, in virtue of which He has entered into the holiest, avails in unchanging efficacy as a perfect satisfaction *to the most absolute claims of divine holiness forever; and we* have no more conscience of sins, no longer are our sins between God and our souls. We have good ground for saying, "Now know I that the Lord will do me good seeing I have His Son to be my priest."

But one asks, Should my *communion* then be unbroken, even if I commit sin, as, alas, I do? Surely not. Nothing is so strong as divine relationship, but nothing so sensitive as communion. It is affected by a foolish thought, i.e., if I have a tender, sensitive conscience which is, in this connection, the only good conscience. A good conscience may be one sadly afflicted, whilst a bad conscience may be quite at ease. But, let me ask, notwithstanding our miserable folly, is not the veil still rent? Does not that precious blood still speak before, and on the throne? Does not every appointment of the tabernacle remain unaffected by our shameful ingratitude? But our *enjoyment* of communion is gone, we are sad and weak and need restoring. For this we are still dependant on the Lord Jesus! for if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 Jn. 2).

But to many there seems to be a contradiction between Hebrews 10:2 and 1 John 2:1. How can it be true that a worshipper once purged should have no more conscience of sins and yet my conscience be affected by the least sin, and my communion broken? The solution of the apparent difficulty lies in the different subjects with which the Spirit of God is dealing in Hebrews and 1 John. In the former it is external

worship and approach to God which was never open in the day of shadows. The blood of bulls and goats could never remove sin from the presence of God. There it was still, and the impassible barrier was evidenced by the unrent veil. God could not get out to men in blessing; men could not get in to God. With such ineffective sacrifices God was not well pleased; they satisfied not that Heart so infinitely tender and warm in love to poor man. His beloved Son saw this dissatisfaction, and cried, "Sacrifices and offerings" like these, so ineffective, "Thou wouldest not"; it needs nobler blood. "Lo, I come." And as His blood was shed, sin, the barrier, was put away for all eternity, the veil was rent, and the way for the feeblest believer in Jesus to draw very near to God was open forevermore.

But in 1 John it is not a worshipper's approach to God, but a child's happy communion with the Father and it is surely not difficult to see how the way of approach may be and is quite unaffected, since it depends on the value of Christ's precious blood without, whilst yet, dear child as still I am, I cannot enjoy the unclouded smile of my Father's face if I have grieved His Spirit within. Our Lord Jesus is in this case my Advocate and leads me to repentance. The repentance is the result of His advocacy, not His advocacy results from my repentance.

There is another very important truth connected with the priesthood: Every simple believer, without any discrimination or difference, is a priest as says the apostle Peter, "Ye are a holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5), "a royal priesthood" (v. 9). And again in that sweet song that opens the book of Revelation, it is to Him who has made us priests to God and His Father. Here there is no difference; the apostle Paul is no more a priest than the feeblest believer of today, or any day.

A selection of a superior class out of the redeemed saints of

God to a priesthood under any name, to stand between them and God, to approach God on their behalf, is exactly that Nicolaitanism, or "supremacy over the laity" (as the word means) that the Lord hates. Not for one instant let it be misunderstood as applying to lowly ministry of the word, or solicitude for His people's welfare — this He loves; but claims to superiority, to an exclusive priesthood, to being lords over their heritage — in a word, the spirit of *clerisy* — this He *hates*. And this is what we see in Micah's act. A good Levite is made a bad priest; and we may, if we will, see it on every side today wherever a *good "minister"* is made a *bad "clergyman."*

## Chapter 18

We left Micah congratulating himself on the assurance that the Lord would now surely do him good, seeing he had a Levite to his priest. Our chapter opens with what is a kind of sad refrain, characteristic of this last part of the book, answering and apparently accounting for that other refrain we have often heard: "Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." This recurs four times: "In those days there was no king of Israel," and in this connection we have another evidence of man's lawlessness: the "freedom of man's will"!

Upon the entry of the people into the land, every tribe had its inheritance divinely marked out for it by the lot. Amongst the others, Dan had a portion that we may be quite sure, like every portion that God gives, was more than ample; but "unto that day the inheritance had not fallen to them." But why? Joshua 19:40-46 gives clearly what Dan's *lot* was. The *lot* had fallen to them, but their inheritance had not; they had not taken possession of what was theirs.* And why?

Judges 1:34 answers: "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley."

Now, independent indeed of all the "lot" might say; as

*Verse 47 of this chapter 19 has been unwarrantably altered by the introduction of the words "too little" in italics — as if God gives less than His people's needs. It should read "and the border of the children of Dan went out from them," i.e., the children of Dan extended their border further.

oblivious to the Lord's appointment as Micah or his mother, turning away from their own inheritance, they seek another in perfect self-will. It is all of a piece with the spirit of the day, to which the present so closely answers; and most weighty and practical it all is for us individually. Be well assured that our God Himself has given us, too, our own portion, and we get it clearly defined for us in Ephesians 1 "He hath blessed us with *all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*"; but we may be equally assured, that if we did not, or cannot, get *possession* of this inheritance, so as to get real enjoyment and satisfaction from it, we shall take up with something else that God has *not* given us. And still are there plenty of "Amorites" ("Talkers," that figure for us the lofty pride of man's carnal reason) to keep us out of it, forcing us into the "mountains"; those "imaginations, and every *high thing* that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5); and keeping us out of the lowly valleys on which the smile of God, whether in the realms of nature, or of grace, ever rests. Yes, my reader, if we do not get our foot on what is our own, we shall take what belongs to others. The Corinthians were driven by the Amorites into the mountains; a lofty assumption of knowledge. What is the result? Failing to enjoy their own, they aim to take their inheritance in this world, to "reign already as kings" in it (1 Cor. 4:8), to "use it as if it were their own" (1 Cor. 7:31). So the Church, as God's witness upon earth, not enjoying or taking hold of her own inheritance, drops down to earth and claims that which God has not given her. She is going to convert the world, and she takes her place in that world: dwelling where Satan's throne is (Rev. 2). So a hundred other things, as easy to conquer as Laish, absorb the Lord's people because they take not possession of their own. Some dear saints are captivated with the idea that they have discovered the lost ten tribes of Israel in the Anglo-Saxon of today; and the strictly heavenly

portion and lot of the Church becomes dimmed, and in measure eclipsed by other interests on the earth. Join with me, beloved reader, in a cry to our God for grace to fight with opposing wicked spirits for our own inheritance in Christ; that we may prove its satisfying power; so shall we say, "The lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places"; and we shall covet no one's silver or gold; neither the worldling's lot, nor Israel's portion.

But to return: The tribe sends out five men to spy out the land, and these come to Micah's house, where they recognize the voice of the young Levite, and at once they enquire as to how he came there, and how much he was getting. The young man has no shame in confessing himself a hireling priest: "Micah hath hired me," he says. One would not desire unnecessarily to wound any dear true servant of Christ in any connection; but it may be asked if, among the many pictures this sorrowful narrative gives us of the present day, this "hiring" of a priest has not all too clear an answer on all sides? Is there nothing that answers to the "ten shekels a year, the suit of apparel, and the victuals"? Is not today the "minister," for the most part, a *hired* priest? And must he not therefore work for, and please and satisfy, those who hire him?

Oh how far — how infinitely far the Church has fallen from her place! The Lord Jesus Christ was once seen as the Head of His Church, giving bountifully and freely all that this, as His Body, needed. *Gifts* (in every sense of the word) were there in abundance. Evangelists, constrained by His love, freely proclaimed the gospel to the poor and the lost. Pastors and teachers, constrained by His love, freely tended and fed the dear flock. And whose servants were they all? Who paid them those wages that even the hireling is worthy of (Lk. 10:7)? Was it a bargain between "the church" on the one

hand, and "the minister" on the other? A simple mercantile transaction: so much ministry for so much pay; so that the rich secured the "best gifts," and the poor had to be satisfied with the inferior quality of ministry they could afford to pay for? Nay, indeed. From the same Head came floods of grace to every part of the Body; and this shewed itself not only in *the free ministry of "spiritual things," not to one company* who could pay, but to the whole Body, whilst the same love constrained the whole to a reciprocating return of carnal things, *all* was abundant, spontaneous, and free. Who can read of those joyous songs of praise going up to God on every side; from both givers and receivers, in which dear Paul must have a part, as he finishes with: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9), and not mourn over the loss, as one looks around on every hand at a *hired* ministry?

And today what is it the *hirers* require? Sound doctrine? Do they long to be told the truth that strips them of all their self-complacency, disturbs the slumber of their consciences, plows deep into their souls, leads them to self-judgment, self-loathing, and finally to joy in God, and glorying in the Lord Jesus? Is the simple preaching of Christ to simple men the popular thing today? Alas, what need to answer? Ever further and further from this are things going. Ever is there an increasing demand for brightness of intellect, brilliancy of speech, natural powers of oratory, that can draw tears by sentimental and pathetic stories, which never touch the conscience; but rather soothe it, by making them feel "*good*," like the sensuous organ-swell through cathedral aisles — for "smart" men; for men that keep up with the "thought" — which is the modest euphemism for infidelity — of the day; the men who can "fill the church." What with, is of less importance. Except that the one thing needful now is that the "*money interests*" must be secured; — all depends on

this; and men of wealth, even though confessedly carnal, are now men of the "pillars of the church," for who but such can pay its expenses? What kind of preaching will they get? The time has indeed fully come "when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts, shall *heap to themselves* (i.e., make their selection, and call) teachers having itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3), whilst of the few spiritual-minded servants of the Lord still to be found in this system of things how many are laid aside as not sufficiently "up to date" to meet this demand?

But may God forbid that we ever speak of such things in a spirit of mere callous accusation or fleshly zeal, which is as abominable as any of these abominations themselves. Only they who, like Daniel, confess their sin, and the sin of their people, *as their own* (Dan. 9:20) will meet with the same tender approval. We never read that Jehu, with all his zeal for the Lord, was addressed as "*man greatly beloved.*" Any carnal person can shew their "zeal for the Lord" (2 Ki. 10:16) in sharp judgment of *others*; those led of His Spirit will indeed speak out faithfully, publicly, in protest against evil; but in the closet will identify themselves with the Lord's people in their low condition in self-judgment and confession, as being in it all, and meet with divine approval.

Our narrative gives us a graphic illustration of "itching ears"; for these five Danite spies piously beg the Levite to "ask counsel of God"; and he, cunning man, as all mere hirelings are or soon learn to be, knows well what is wanted, and supplies it in the answer: "Go in peace, before the Lord is your way." Oh, yes, smooth things are desired and smooth things are easily prophesied. Professing Christians are everywhere going quite contrary to God's Word — are seeking their inheritance in a world under judgment, are joining in the mad race for riches with the world — never

mind, for have they not one whose business it is, and indeed whom they hire, to enquire of the Lord for them, and do they not weekly hear from the pulpits the reply, "Go in peace, before the Lord is your way"?

And all does go smoothly for them in both cases, then and now. They find what they want in the extreme north — far off indeed from the Tabernacle at Shiloh, far off from God — where a people is dwelling in a careless sense of security; which, in connection with the richness of the land, is inducement enough for the emigration of 600 men of Dan "appointed with weapons of war."

On their way north they came to Mount Ephraim, and at the hint of the five spies, the whole band turns aside and takes its station at the gate of Micah's house. The five go in, and appropriate "the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image," Micah's hired priest looking on; and at last mildly saying, "What do ye?" The answer is a "call to a greater sphere of usefulness." "Is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?" Such an argument is irresistible, "and the priest's heart was glad;" (many a hireling heart has danced to the same music since then) and he took charge of the idolatrous paraphernalia, and departed in the midst of the people.

Micah, and a few sympathetic neighbors, follow, and overtaking them, there follows a colloquy that almost forces a smile — "What aileth thee?" they say. Micah answers, "Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? And what is this that ye say unto me. What aileth thee? Truly it is adding insult to injury." But they give him counsel:

"Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows

run upon thee, and thou lose thy life with the lives of thy household."

They are too strong for him, and he has to return disconsolate to his house. There the narrative leaves him, whilst it follows the fortunes of the Danites, who capture Laish, change its name to Dan after the name of their father, as if the deed had given honor to that name that should speak only of righteous "judgment," set up the graven image, and Jonathan (for at last we are told the name of this Levite), the son of Gershom the son — not of Manasseh as in the Authorized Version, but — of *Moses*; "he, and his sons, were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land."

What a story this genealogy tells of the need of another than natural birth. Possibly there are some links omitted, but this hireling, idolatrous, false priest is a direct lineal descendant from "*Moses*, the servant of God." There is no transmission of piety by natural generation. The child of the most honored servant that ever lived needs to be born — not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but of *God*.

And think you, dear reader, that we are told all this simply that we may be interested in a narrative; or have you and I a vital, direct interest in it? Are we — you and I — living in exactly the days of the same character and in the same state of things as here portrayed? Are we living in the last days? Is there, or is there not, on all sides an abundance of "*religion*"? Everywhere a "form of piety," whilst "the *power*" is denied. Is an external membership of a church — which in itself is utterly unknown to Scripture — all that is looked for? Must poor young hearts who know nothing of the satisfying power of the love of Christ be kept together, and under an opiate of religiousness, far away from Him, by a lot

of fleshly worldly attractions which the carnal mind, "enmity with God" though it be, can appreciate and enjoy?

It is true all went smoothly with them and God was silent. No convulsion of nature, no earthquake, nor sun in sackcloth marked His displeasure with the deed. Why then appeal to an old book as being against it, when "*providence*" was so evidently for it? And as generation followed generation, ever stronger would grow this argument: "Art thou so much wiser and better than all who have gone before? Dost thou think God would have permitted the continuance of this city all this time, if He had so seriously disapproved of what thou callest the idolatry and wickedness connected with it?" "Dost thou think that God can really disapprove of worldliness, a hired ministry, sectarianism, dependence on money, and many other things that we must concede is not quite in accord with that Book which thou callest His Word (but on this our learned teachers throw much doubt in these enlightened days) and have permitted them to continue so long?" Yes, doubtless such was, and is the reasoning that quieted, and now quiets, troublesome consciences. But there was a limit then, there will be a limit now. That limit was not exactly the public approval of it all; but "the captivity of the land." And so shall it be, "Sudden destruction in the midst of the cry of Peace and Safety." Long deferred judgment shall fall, and woe to those in the abominations there.

Then once more mark it well, that the saddest and most significant feature of the whole sad incident is in the *form of piety* that pervades it all; and turn to 2 Timothy 3 and carefully count how many of the marks of these last days it evidences: "For men shall be lovers of their ownselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection; implacable, slanderers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those

that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" — and yet with all — "*having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.*"

"*From such turn away*" is the divine command. "Turn away"; continue not in any company whose very spirit, religious though it be, is hostile to the cross of thy Savior-Lord. "Turn away" — not with pharasaic self-complacency nor without sorrow; but in the spirit of Him who, in turning away from Jerusalem could weep over it; and was closely followed by one who wrote of such "even weeping" (Phil. 3): Turn away from this broad way; which I am ever more and more convinced is not an irreligious one at all, quite the reverse. It is the way that because decent, respectable and religious "seemeth right unto a man." No unclean, impure, vile, wicked path "seemeth right," even to those walking in it. Conscience loudly cries, till seared, "All this is *wrong*." But this patch of mere external profession and church membership certainly "seemeth right," yet the end thereof is *death*! So turn away and seek what may be, nay, will be, a narrower *path*, but walk not in it with narrower *heart*. "Follow righteousness, faith, love, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2). But see to it, as you value your Lord's approval, your soul's welfare, that Satan does not push to the other extreme of esteeming some little "circle," or company, or party, to be then pure-hearted ones exclusively. "Them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" is the whole company of manifest believers, who evidence true living faith by holiness of life, warmth of divine affection, and Christ-honoring purity of doctrine. Turn to Acts 15:9 and 26:18 and mark well what it is that purifies the heart. Simply Faith. Not uniformity of conviction as to an ordinance, nor as to church government, nor a hundred minor truths, all of them important in their place, but simply

"Faith *in Me*." Well indeed has the Holy Ghost witnessed of these last days that they are perilous or difficult; for dangers press closely on either hand of our narrow way; Christ, only in helpless dependence on Him is safety; yet remember and heed the simple, plain, solemn word: "*From such turn away*."

## Chapter 19

# CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE

We began our meditations on this book by noting the striking antithesis between the first and last chapters. We have now traced the intervening path over hill and dale, anon on the solid firm ground of faith, and anon through bog and marsh of unbelief; at times in the sunlight of divine approval, at times through the dark shadow of evil in the sight of the Lord. A checkered path, to which that of the Church has too truly answered, to which our individual course, if one may speak for others, has not greatly differed — to our shame be it confessed.

We started from that lofty upland of faith, where we saw Caleb, Othniel, and Achsah having this testimony that their bold faith pleased God, and now we come to the "last days" — where we must look at such a slough of filth and bloodshed — of corruption and violence, that may well fill us with shame, and, if God be pleased to grant His blessing, with wholesome self-judgment.

For, my dear brother or sister, you who have walked this path with me, we need to remind each other once more that these things were not written under divine inspiration simply to give us a lesson in history. A deeper worthier purpose may be found in their being "profitable." "The man of God may be perfect" (2 Tim. 3). Now, if the application of these scenes stops with the actors in them, or with Israel, then are we

excluded from this profit; for this they must apply to *us*, "on whom the ends of the ages have come." But who is skilled to interpret them? God be thanked that the same holy Spirit who indited them is still with us to interpret. Let us look together to God that we may discern His mind, and our hearts be open to accept all He would give us.

The three chapters speak of the one incident and its results. It occurred when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before the ark (ch. 20:28). Yet does its divinely given place at the end of the book tell us that it is the moral character that, whilst working silently all through this period of Judges, comes out most prominently at the end — the last days are the worst days.

It begins and closes with that strange and significant word "in those days there was no king in Israel;" that we have already looked at, but may consider a little further. The words speak of there being no recognized authority that must be submitted to: Every one is a law to themselves: they do "what is right in their own eyes." "The people" is sovereign. It is democracy among the professed people of God. To this all things ever tend in this world, whether in the political sphere or ecclesiastical. Daniel's image tells the story in the one; confirmed by the manifest trend among the nations of the prophetic earth; the one word "Laodicea" may, to our opened ear, perhaps tell the same story in the other. For "Laodicea" means "the people's rights"; "the rights of the *laity*"; and in the reaction from the tyranny of Jezebel: the spurious ecclesiastical assumption in Thyatira, men swing to the other extreme of denying all authority or rule in the Church of God. The spirit of democracy, of insubordination, and impatience with all restraint, has now surely invaded the spiritual sphere. The heart, no longer subject to Christ, no longer loves to recognize His "rulers" in the lowly ones that

toil and serve the saints (1 Th. 5). What wonder if we find the same condition of things in the professing church, as is here in type plainly depicted for us in Israel. And is not *high* truth, with *low* life — pretension with flagrant looseness — utterly repulsive to any right-thinking mind? What wonder then if in the antitype we hear such awful words of loathing as these, "I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3). If the Spirit of *self-justification* and *accusation of other* brethren, is not now the distinguishing mark of those who once were characterized by love to one another; then, again I say, dismiss all my interpretation as false.

I do not propose to go over the chapter in all its details. I must ask my readers to do this for themselves. I would simply seek to get some of the lessons God would give us from it.

As in the previous instance the trouble begins with a Levite — with one who was intended to be a *minister* of the sanctuary — but by no means ends there. Evil is not in one spot only, but on every hand. No one is wholly sinless, or wholly sinned *against*. The man may not have gone against any divine law in taking a woman into the relationship mentioned. Abraham, Caleb, David, etc., all seem to have done so, without guilt being directly attributed to them; but the general evidence of loving pleasure and carnal ease is very clearly manifested in him. He is easily persuaded to linger day after day, and hour after hour of precious time, "Comforting his heart" by eating and drinking: the low pleasures man shares equally with the brute in satisfying fleshly appetites.

Not till the afternoon of the fifth day does he start on his return, and as he comes to Jerusalem the sun is fast sinking, and night draws on. But Jerusalem is no longer known by that name; it is now Jebus, for it is in the hands of the stranger. It is its name today; for "Jebus" simply means "the place

trodden down;" and, in a way, the Lord Jesus gave it that name when He said Jerusalem shall be trodden down (Jebus) of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

So they turn aside to Gibeah a city of Benjamin. There are they most coldly welcomed, sitting down in the open space awaiting some hospitable invitation, which does not come till an old man comes in from his day's labor, and opens his house to them. Alas, they find that Gibeah is but Sodom over again, nor does Israel ever change this character. Long after this the Lord cries even of the prophets of Jerusalem, "They are all of them unto one as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah" (Jer. 23:14). So here, every shocking trait of Sodom is seen in the Israelite city of Gibeah; as Christendom (2 Tim. 3:1-5) can reproduce as we have seen, the same evil fruit as heathendom (Rom. 1:29-32). At all times, in all places, man is the same man: vile, impure, burning with passions to which he is an unconscious slave; and no external form will really help him.

It is indeed by no means a pleasant theme, and one is tempted to hurry past it with little comment, yet may there be humbling, and yet blessed lessons in it all for us. Let us look at that vile crowd that beset the door of Lot in Sodom, and of the old man in Gibeah. In one sense we must confess that they are not fair representatives of *all* men. Scripture plainly recognizes degrees of *intensity* of evil. There are always "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort." These moral orders, ranks, and distinctions are amongst men — not as viewed in the light of God — not as seen through His eye which looks deep down into the heart — but on the surface, as external conduct permits comparison with one another.

A well-known and most popular writer attempts to impugn the truth of Romans 3:10-18, by taking one clause (v. 15),

"their feet are swift to shed blood," and applying it to a little girl. "My dear," he affects to say to the child, "go and pull your kitty's tail." "I will not," answers the little one. "Why should I hurt poor kitty?" "Ah," cries the philosopher, "then it is surely not true of man universally that 'their feet are swift to shed blood,'."

Nor is it for a moment said that it is, in this sense; but God who looks, not on the surface, but beneath it, where seeds of evil lie ready to germinate at any time under favorable conditions, tells us faithfully and truly the character of those seeds, and their *possibilities*; whilst on all sides are there sufficient evidences of these "possibilities" becoming actualities, to show that the picture is not overdrawn.

Now, in the light of this solemn truth look once more on that crowd round Lot's door, and the door in Gibeah, hearken to their shameful demand, listen to the record of the same humiliating deeds in Romans 1:21-32, and see the germination of the same seed-possibilities — possibilities that are not eliminated by the thickest veneer of civilization, as there are still humiliating evidences — in every heart of man.

*But of man only.* No brute — unclean, impure, and shameless as they may by nature be, in many respects — ever sinks as low as this. This is true of man, and of man only. But what does this prove? Well, *the impossibility of any other account of the beginning of things than that found in the Scriptures.*

Evolution is the almost universally accepted theory of the day. There are few who make the slightest pretensions to intelligence who do not accept, in some form or degree, this theory. Man is the highest product of a constant evolution — a law ever working upward, ever producing the nobler from the less noble, from the original protoplasm, through

mollusc, and vertebrate, and ape, to *man*. But if this is true, how is it that we find in man — the noblest and highest — a loathsome vileness that is not found in any of those from whom he has been evolved? This is no remnant of *past* bestiality, for it is not *there*. Where, then, did he get this awful trait? He is, at one and the same time, evidently above the brutes in some respects, and yet, as evidently, below them in others. Such plain facts are as absolutely inconsistent with the whole theory of evolution as they are perfectly harmonious with the truth of Scripture: the creation and the fall. By the Word of God we learn that man is the top stone of this old creation, its highest expression. But suppose we take a stone and let it fall from the height of one foot on to mud; it will simply lay on the surface. Now drop it from ten feet; it will naturally penetrate far deeper; whilst from a greater height, it will sink proportionately further in the filth. One may measure the height from which the stone fell, by the depth to which it has sunk.

Now, if man has morally fallen from the greater height; if he has turned away from the grace and kindness that would follow him even in his fall; is it strange if we find him sunken, in some ways, far lower than any other creature? It is exactly what might be expected, and it is exactly what is here evidenced. If Sodom and Gibeah do nothing else they at least prove the truth of Scripture.

Nor is "corruption" the only sphere in which this is evidenced. My readers will be compelled to admit with me, that in the other evil sphere of "violence," man's cruelty equally exceeds that of any of the lower creation. It is not the remains of the brute-nature that makes him torture — as in the days of the Inquisition, as in times of religious persecution, as in the barbarities of savage tribes; and, must it not be confessed, as in the lawless burnings in our own time.—

with terrible ingenuity, his own kind. Such a suggestion demands an apology to the very brutes.

But we spoke of there being blessing even in this — is this possible? Indeed it is. For is it not good to know that God *knows the very worst of us*; and, knowing this, has so tenderly, infinitely loved us, that He has not withheld the only remedy that could meet so desperate a case. You and I are, even yet, but little acquainted with the evil possibilities of our own hearts or natures. From time to time we are shocked at a further glimpse of these; but it is no surprise to God. He knew it all, knew the worst, long ago; and in view of this, note the profound depths in that word. "For He hath made Him to be *Sin* for us who knew no sin." "Made Him to be Sin"; far beyond our apprehension of the evil within us; this would be a measure as varying as the number of His people. Nay, it is up to *His measure*; up to *His infinite knowledge of the latent possibilities* of the evil in man — the worst, the very worst. *He* was made *this*! Can you wonder that the infinitely sensitive holiness of His nature shrunk with horror, as this shadow of the great darkness began to fall upon His Spirit; till, in such a prospect, "His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground." It is holy ground we tread here, let us rather meditate in adoring silence, than multiply words.

Nor is it easy to return to our sad narrative from such a scene, but we must come down from the mount to the plain. There we find the Levite, the minister of the sanctuary, the servant of God has purchased his own honor by abandoning his weaker companion to the lusts of the mob. Truly one of our own poets has well said of such —

"His honor, rooted in dishonor, stood."

The morning light reveals the full cost of his own safety. The poor dishonored body lies at the door, with her hands upon

the violated threshold, as if in appeal for that protection every house in Israel should have afforded.

The Levite carries it to his home, cuts it in twelve pieces, and sends a portion to each of the tribes as a witness of — what? The sin of a few, or the condition of the whole? Surely not of the few only; but the universal comment "There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day," simply means Israel had never been in the condition in which such a deed *could* have been done. The tide has been ebbing long, till the hidden vileness at the lower level is seen; and "the body" speaks this, as every similar enormity does to all. Will the people hear that speech? Will they take it home to themselves? The next chapter answers this.

## Chapter 20

# THE LAST FIGHT

These last two chapters give us a picture of what we may call "discipline in the last days"; discipline as carried out by a people who are still owned of God as His; and yet who are so out of communion with Him that they have first to be disciplined themselves, even in carrying it out.

The opening of the chapter shows us a great assembly of all the tribes — Benjamin alone excepted — to the Lord in Mizpeh. There is a solemnity and dignity in this mighty gathering that is very striking; it is called the "assembly of the people of God." We must admit, too, that they are in a good position. No one can surely say one word of criticism against being "gathered to the Lord in Mizpeh." The *position* is excellent.

And this compels me to digress for a moment, and apply to the present day the very danger that may be connected with a true position. Would that every dear reader of these lines knew and enjoyed the scriptural truth, that has been recovered for us, by God's grace, in these last days, of being gathered simply to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of us have rejoiced greatly at finding that nothing is really lacking even to "two or three" when gathered, in simplicity and confessed weakness, to that holy Name. He is, according to His faithful promise, in the midst, and little need have we to trouble about anything else. We have no other attraction;

no stately building, no soul-entrancing music, no imposing liturgy, no ordained clergy, no oratorical preaching, no intellectual essays, no large numbers; but He, our Lord and Lover who sums all worth, is *really "in the midst,"* and all is well indeed.

Thus to know no gathering Center than His holy Name, to disavow all minor separating differences, to allow convictions on no secondary truths to divide from other believers; but to confess — and not only theoretically to confess, but to carry it out in practice — that we are *one* with all saints; — this is a scriptural, and very precious *position*, available to the very end.

But it can only be maintained by a corresponding *condition* of lowliness and dependence. We may, alas, very easily have the external position, without the power or blessing of it, without the joyous liberty, without the genuine dependence on the Lord Jesus; and the profession of fellowship with all saints may be still retained, but the power of it, in divine love, may have gone, until the profession is but an empty word, denied constantly in practice.

So was it in Israel: her position was excellent, her condition deplorable.

The Levite gives his account of the wickedness, only with a natural care not to expose his own selfish baseness: "The men of Gibeah rose against me, thought to have slain me, and my concubine have they forced that she is dead."

It works mightily — the host is moved by one impulse; they are gathered "as one man" (v. 1); they arise "as one man" (v. 8); they act "as one man" (V. 11). What more can be desired than a *right position* and *unanimity*?

Let us look on this scene and learn that much may still be

lacking even to such. Swiftly the eleven tribes leap to judgment; instantly their swords are out; loud are they in their indignant threats, which shall evidence their own superior purity and burning zeal for God. They will do as the law commanded, and "put away evil from Israel." Little do they realize what that means, or how near to themselves that will cut. Put away evil! Why, it is from Dan to Beersheba, in the very warp and woof of their domestic lives, as the story of Micah evidences; but they see it in Benjamin alone, and ignoring all else, will deal with it there.

Ah, my dear readers, it is always easy to judge some one else. It feeds, often quite unconsciously, the natural self-complacency of the flesh in us. It takes no spirituality to "judge." "If any one be overtaken in a fault," is it written, "*judge* such an one"? Not at all; but "*restore*" such an one; and only the spiritual can do that. But how will spirituality show itself? In "considering *thyself* lest thou also be tempted." In a word, self-judgment must always precede judgment of others, and where there is self-judgment, the restoration of the offender will be sought first.

Oh, to learn today just where all judgment must begin: *not with any one else, but with myself.* First cast out the beam from our own eye, then shall we see clearly to pluck the mote from our brother's. Judgment must always begin in that which is closest, and radiate outwardly. The first necessity today is not the putting away of evil from others, but from ourselves. Nothing takes the place of this. And always, at the end of a dispensation, we may see what is evidenced in this gathering of Israel at Mizpeh. Zeal in those in a correct position in condemning others' slackness is judging themselves. Has it not been, is it not so with us in our day? It is but another evidence that we are at the *end.*

So at least was it in Israel. They take little counsel of the Lord. What need? Is not their duty clear, in view of the flagrancy of the wickedness? They simply send a hard, lofty, exasperating message to Benjamin: "What wickedness is this that is done among you?" It is only "among you;" *we* are quite free of evil. Is it any wonder that Benjamin would not hearken? So they go out to battle and the Lord permits the fruit — the unavoidable fruit of universal declension from Himself — to be evidenced at the very end, by *conflict between brethren*!

But they do ask counsel. There are no tears, no sorrow, no self-judgment, no just sense of the common sin, and shame, and humiliation of it all, no real recognition of relationship, no "Benjamin, *my brother*"; but they simply assume the place of righteous executors of judgment, and the only question is — and this they ask of Jehovah — "Who shall go up *first* against the children of Benjamin?"

Did no memory recall, no heart feel, no eye weep over the contrast with that earlier day when they had asked, "Who shall go up first against *the Canaanite*?" There is no record to tell us this. But look around. Time was when every child of God was linked in love with every other saint, to fight only against common foes within and without. And now — *now* — what need to depict the sorrowful contrast? To dwell on it might look like accusation, but is not the contrast with those early days of Acts evident; is not the similarity with Israel at Mizpeh all too clear?

The first day's battle has a strange result. Defeat is the portion of the tribes. But it is good to see the wholesome lessons that that defeat teaches, and that are quickly learned. For now the people *weep* before the Lord. Bochim is found again, and the Angel of the Lord is still there — has never left

it; and whenever we too go to Bochim we too are met in tenderest grace — whenever brethren weep together, rather than fight together, or weep at the very necessity of conflict, surely there is blessing; and fain would we hope that even with us there has been more tendency to this of late. Now, too, Israel is becoming tender of spirit, and vital unchangeable relationships are recognized (not *made*, mark, they have always been there) as they now ask if it is Jehovah's will that they again go up against "Benjamin my brother."

Yes, they must go up again. It is not the permission of complacency, but rather in the way of continued discipline; the lessons must be plowed in deeper; they must walk the path they have chosen, to the end.

But again Israel's blood flows freely, and again are defeat and humiliation pressed upon them. Strange, perplexing enigma! They have asked, "Who should go up?" and then "Should they go up at all?" and it is only in simple obedience that they have gone to battle, yet are they shamefully defeated!

It was purely chastening — they had not heard the word "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten," but *we* have. And may we not see in the conflict still permitted between certain saints, in the utterly ineffectual efforts to heal breaches, the fulfillment of the same word to the very last condition of the Church, as a witness of God in the earth, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Oh, to hear and heed that gracious word, my brethren. He loves us. Our very sorrows, our very shame, our very defeats prove that He loves us. When we are gone from the scene, the apostate mass will get together under one head quickly enough; and *then* so shall *we*, with our Head, *but not here*.

One may discern the further lessons learned consequent on

the second defeat, for now the people not only weep but "*fast*," and wait quietly on the Lord, sitting before Him. They begin to discover that God has a controversy with them, and they humble themselves under that mighty Hand, in repentance. This is exactly the one and alone path of safety and blessing this very hour for every one that has an ear to hear. For is it not to this same time and condition that this word is spoken, "*Be zealous, therefore, and repent*" (Rev. 3:19)?

But not only does Israel get further from the world in fasting, but closer to the Lord by offerings. It is true that there seems to be a strange defect in the omission of the sin offering; but they put themselves out of sight, as it were. They seem to say, "Look on these offerings that Thou hast ordained — Remember Thy altar — Behold, oh, God, our shield, and look upon the face of Thine anointed. Here is One worthy of Thy regard. The value of His devotion to Thy glory in the Burnt-offering, of His love to Thy people seen in the Peace-offering is as precious to Thee as ever. We have failed; we fall back on the offering."

So do *we*, beloved. We have failed; but now we may hear a clear voice filled with strong melody, "I am the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the beginning of the Creation of God," and this is our comfort and rest even today.

Well, victory comes on the third day: a sad, sad victory, in connection with which there is no joyful song; no Deborah is found to raise a paean of triumph; there is still nothing but weeping, as much now on account of their victory, as before, for their defeat.

But are we then to gather that discipline is impossible in the last days; that, inasmuch as none can say that they are without sin, that therefore none can exercise *any* discipline?

The conclusion is unwarranted. It goes too far. It would make us distinctly disobedient to a plain command of Scripture; and no human failure, down to the very end, can weaken, far less nullify, one jot or tittle of the divine Word. Truth is always in balancing lines; any truth, if not held in proper balance with its opposite truth, but if forced to an extreme, becomes error. For example: if, in clear recognition of the truth of complete failure everywhere, it is insisted that there can now be no discipline; no admonition as a brother of him that walks disorderly, whilst shunning his companionship (2 Th. 3:14, 15); no wholesome, severe rebuke before all, that others also may fear (1 Tim. 5:20); no putting away from among ourselves of a wicked person (1 Cor. 5); then is this dangerous error, dishonoring to God's Word, and destructive of the holiness that must characterize the assembly of His people.

If, on the other hand, any principle be admitted that results in the severest discipline known to the New Testament; — that found in 1 Corinthians 5, and there applied to the most flagrant moral depravity — being practically directed against fellow-saints; so that they are, as far as lies in us, kept away from His Table, then is the error as pernicious, serious and sad in its effects as the other.

We live in the midst of both these errors, in full fruitage on all sides. On the one hand we see almost, if not entire, indifference and carelessness as to discipline; on the other we see some subverting the very truth of the unity they profess to maintain, by separation — not from sin, that were well; not from wickedness, that were to be commended; not from the world, that were honoring to God, but from *one another*; from saints equally manifesting the holy and divinely formed membership of the One Body.

What shall we do? Where shall we turn? Shall we once more come out from all, and start afresh, as a few saints did in simplicity about seventy-five years ago? Let me answer by a question. Have we not learned by our meditations on this precious book that God never simply repeats? That an Othniel, an Ehud, a Barak, a Gideon, a Jephthah, a Samson, are none of them repetitions of the other? Always is there a new worker, to work a new work, to meet the new conditions.

No, we must not look back and imitate, except on the broad lines of "whose *faith* follow." We must, as individuals, wait on God, *now*, and look up. We must wait on God, and be individually obedient to His Word, as we have light on it. Let us take this as an axiom: that Word is not weakened by our failure. We are as bound to be obedient to every letter of it, as if there had been no failure at all; as bound, therefore, to be separate from evil as were the first believers; as bound to admit to closest fellowship every single clearly evidenced member of the One Body, as were the saints at Pentecost. Let my dear readers be much in prayer before God; let them, in lowly, sincere self-judgment, confess the universal sin and failure, and their own share in it; let them in the same lowly tenderness of spirit, testify to the truth of the holiness of God's House on the one hand, and of the unity of the Body of Christ on the other, and — leave the rest with God. It will very likely be that they may find their path growing more trying, more lonely, but let them cry mightily to God lest their affections become narrowed to fewer than all saints, — their hearts contracted to less than the whole Church — their interests self-centered; for, if so, they will but form together another sect, another shame.

It may be absolutely impossible to avoid the appearance of this, and men may so call them; but they can well endure this, *if God does not call them so*.

Finally, let us ever remember that if I see a brother sin, it is a loud call indeed — but for what? For judgment on him? Not first, but first and foremost for self-judgment. Mark it well. Serious work is now before me requiring delicacy of discernment, tenderness of heart, a divine discrimination, activity of love, every effort to restore; then, and not till then, the little company gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in that holy Name, must take faithful and solemn action in putting the offender away from their company.

Such discipline is not vain, but as weighty, as solemn, as effective as ever. Numbers never gave validity to it. Carnal ecclesiastical pretensions never were its power. The present parodies on it, in the exclusion of saints, bear no resemblance to it. It was, it is, it ever will be, the One Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which the power of all discipline lies! and two or three gathered, in utter weakness and dependence, to that Name, have all the power for discipline that the Assembly of God ever had, at any time, in any place, or will have — till He Come.

## Chapter 21

# THE LAST FIGHT (continued)

We must look a little longer together at this distressing incident, in the sad gloom of which our book closes. The eleven tribes have vindicated their claim to superior purity and holiness in a glorious victory, and they celebrate it by "*weeping sore*"! And indeed they have good reason for weeping, since they have lost, in this fratricidal conflict, some 65,000 warriors. It is Moab and Ammon, Philistia and Edom who may now rejoice, but Israel must weep. The real foes of God's truth have little to fear from brethren in conflict with each other. It is infidelity and superstition, rationalism and ritualism, worldliness and wickedness, that may rejoice when brethren contend, whilst, whether losing or winning, these must "*weep sore.*"

And yet with all their weeping, they have but a very superficial apprehension of the root of all the trouble. With a strange simplicity, or rather folly, they ask the Lord, "Why is it come to pass that a tribe is lacking in Israel?" as if *they* had had no hand in it at all.

Ah, my brethren, it is never easy for a man, as such, to discern the true reason for chastening. The tower of Siloam always falls on those peculiarly sinful. The fires in the theatres, the railroad accidents on the Lord's Day, the blotting out of some fair isle in the Pacific — these things are always because "*they* are sinners above all" to the religious

world. Nay, nay, the loud word that such startling events ever cry to an opened ear is, "Unless ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." We have in us the same nature as those that suffer.

Nor do changing dispensations alter the character of God's government in this respect. Here it is Israel that is being chastened, and is asking, "Why?" Centuries later it is the church at Corinth, where there were many "weak," or, as we say, "delicate"; many "sick," i.e., laid aside altogether by illness; whilst many indeed were "falling asleep"; they had gone to an untimely grave. And the Christians were asking "Why?" The apostle interprets for them these distressing conditions. It was the Lord's hand upon them all in chastening, for their carnal spirit, showing itself in the profane treatment of holy things, coming together, not with a tenderness befitting the memories of the Lord's Supper, but, in carnal indifference, "each taking before other his own supper." The Lord is not indifferent to the conduct of His people, and he chastens them now, that they may not be condemned with the world in a future day.

But may I be permitted to speak here a little further a word of warning as to the interpretation of God's ways in chastening? Do not these Scriptures really teach us that the chastening of the Lord is not to be reckoned as confined to those who may be the direct subjects of it, but to be taken as being on the gathering or company of the Lord's people *as a whole*. If my brother or sister is sick or infirm, shall I interpret the dealings of God as making a discrimination in my favor and to their loss? If my brother falls asleep, shall I say, "Behold the judgment of the Lord *upon him*?" Was it thus the Lord's people in Corinth were to interpret His hand as being, not upon them for their carnality, but upon the individuals who were alone directly suffering?

It is a shameful interpretation, and one that would point,

with fearful certainty, to "*Brotherly Love*" being dead. Why, my brethren, if our brother after the flesh or any member of our family is delicate, or weak, do we claim it is God's judgment on the *child*? If wife or husband die, is it judgment on the loved partner of our lives? Is not such an argument evidence of a thorough obliviousness to the strong ties that bind us together as one? Could we ever so speak, if my brother were as dear to me as Christ is to God: as I am to *Christ*? (Jn. 15:9; 17:23).

And yet is this altogether unknown among Christians in these days of chilled love and drooping affections? As if it were not at all upon *us* that His hand were laid when infirmity, sickness, untimely falling asleep show the activity of that Hand in our midst. No longer seems it true nowadays that "if one member suffer all the members *suffer* with it;" but, alas, when party-spirit runs high, members of the same body, but of different "parties," interpret the sorrows and sufferings of their fellow members to their own glory — a shameful glory, indeed!

Permit me to run the risk of wearying by repetition, for I believe the Spirit of God would press this upon us in these days — that we should see in each "*weak* one" a strong call to self-judgment, not for judgment of him; in each "*sick*" one, a cause for an awakening of our own conscience, not that of others; in each saint untimely "falling asleep," a loud alarm for our own walk and ways, that they may be in the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, and thus shall sorrow have its divinely-interpreted effect upon us all; and thus shall we walk with God in love and holiness.

And yet at times — at rare times I venture to think — it may be said, we have almost clear counterparts to such direct judgment as on Uzzah when he touched the ark —

unmistakable evidences of God's hand swiftly following a fleshly dealing with the holiest of all, or some similar forwardness of zealous flesh. Am I to be blind to clear cause and effect? Most surely not; but let me emphasize to my own soul that I must not be blind to the *whole* cause, the *real root cause*. It is a narrow false view that sees *only* my brother's sin, and does not at all identify myself with it. There are few things more sad, and indeed dangerous, than this cold and loveless interpretation of God's ways. But granted that it be equally clear and unmistakable, as in the days of Uzzah, then what will true piety do but bow the head and kiss the rod, search out the root of the thing and learn the lesson of the reverence due to the "Ark," or such lessons as may be needed? For Uzzah's impropriety spoke not only of his own personal condition, but it was surely an outgrowth and evidence of the whole condition of that day and hour. It was a fruit that was due to a *root* that was not in him alone, but in the state of all Israel, more or less, at the time, or David himself would not have been immediately offended, and sided with Uzzah against the Lord, as it were. "And David was displased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah." David and Uzzah were not then, morally, so very far apart; and David has to learn by the "blessing" on the house of Obed Edom that the Ark was a source of blessing and life, not death; then the joy, and the singing, and the dancing show that the lesson has been well learned.

Thus are we divinely guarded on both sides; a wall is on either side of our narrow way. If His hand is upon one or another, let us beware on the one hand lest we miss His lesson, and see only judgment on another, not ourselves at all. On the other hand beware lest we miss His lesson, and, if it have come very close to us, we be offended, and judge Him. "Light" calls us to bow our heads to search hearts, and echo in feebleness that cry, "Thou art holy." "Love" calls us to

bow our heads and search hearts and cry, Oh my brother, how far has *my* folly and carnality induced His hand thus upon us in *thy* suffering?

To return to our narrative. Israel in this last view we have of her here never confesses her true condition; and much it is to be feared that in this she will picture all too faithfully at least one point in which the Church will also woefully fail at the closing period of her testimony on earth. Quick and severe in their judgment of some flagrant cases of startling immorality, utterly indifferent to the worldliness, the "covetousness which is idolatry," the Christ-dishonoring doctrines and practices that are honeycombing them — the last state, in both cases, is self-exaltation.

Israel at least awakens to the fact that it is their own brother Benjamin they have almost annihilated. A feeble remnant of 600 men alone remain, taking sanctuary in the rock Rimmon. Every man, every woman, every little child of this tribe has perished, and, unless some expedient can be found, the 600, too, must die out, for all have sworn an oath not to permit any marriage with Benjamin, and Israel will henceforth be composed of eleven, instead of twelve, tribes.

But in that same day of righteous indignation they had sworn another oath — that whosoever "came not up to the Lord to Mizpah" should be put to death. Well, by a little ingenuity, they may be able to make one oath offset the other; for the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead came not up, and must suffer the penalty of neutrality with their lives.

For the people will religiously keep their oaths! They must maintain their "principles"! Their "principles" demanded the extirpation of a tribe; and now the same strict "principles" require the extirpation of a city to save that tribe from extirpation. As long as "principles" do not compel

them to confess their own sin, they certainly will maintain them, and a fresh use of the sword must offset a too free use of it. Neutrality between contending brethren is ever the most heinous, the most unpardonable of crimes. Even Moses had to flee when he would set brethren at one. And here, when evil is permeating everywhere, when God's controversy is evidently with His people as a whole, a city that has not been involved in the disciplining *they are repenting of*, is to suffer a like discipline. Strange "principles" that yield such fruit, as to result in nothing but the cutting off of their own brethren always.

Never, however, is there consistency in erroneous principles. The people do not, and cannot, carry them out consistently. If they did, both city and tribe would have perished. They spare 400 maidens; as if this were not as much a breaking of their oath as if they had spared the city. The little children of Jabesh must die, but the 400 maidens may live. Many of my readers will not find it difficult to remember modern instance of a similar inconsistency with false principles — a happy inconsistency, it is true, since at least some are spared.

But still the scheme is only partially successful. The young maidens of Jabesh, mourning their slain relatives, do not suffice; 200 more are needed, so others must suffer. A feast of the Lord is now of service, and they counsel taking advantage of it for rapine, and to turn its joy into sorrow. The closest ties of the family must be pitilessly disrupted, so long as they maintain their oaths, or "principles." That anything should be wrong in those principles, and their self-imposed oaths that compel such cruel rending asunder of relationships, stifle in them all the dictates of brotherly affection, and the sweet instincts of the new life, never seems to suggest itself to them. No, the whole book closes in gloom.

Yet had you gone to any of those Israelites, after all the bloodshed and rapine was over, each would have said, "I at least have done what was right." It is this that is left in our ears as the last word, "Everyone had done quite right in his own eyes." Micah was *right* in his "pious" idolatry; his mother was *right* in her fellowship in this; the Danites were *right* in all their cruel ways, for did they not desire religious instruction for a tribe; the tribes did *right* in all their ways, in swearing oaths — *right* in evading them; everyone is *right*. Everyone has a quiet conscience, which is by no means equivalent to a *good* one. So shall it be today. Much light, much knowledge, much boasting in principles that lead into direct conflict with God's Word, much "silver" given for pious idolatry — all going in opposite directions, and yet all perfectly right in their own eyes; all equally confident that the fault lies entirely with some one else, and all claiming this to be right — to the very end.

But is there no hope, no relief, no path of certainty? Surely one is not to do what is wrong, even in one's own eyes; *that* could not be defended. Am I not at least compelled to do what I believe to be right? Aye, surely. But if ever, in the whole history of Adam's fallen race, there was a moment when it imperatively behooved each one to remember that *another* Eye was upon us the eye of Him whom we desire to hear say, when in a few days we see Him, "Thou hast done right in *My* Eyes;" that moment is the present. And is the way to this result difficult, or in the least obscure or doubtful? Beloved reader, often, as we have gone through our book together, have I sought your fellowship; and now for the last time I ask it in listening with me to two Scriptures: so clear and simple, that even the poor wayfaring man, who may feel, as you and I may do, amid all this confusion and conflict, that he is but a "fool," yet need not err; need only *be* a

*wayfaring* man; with the Lord Jesus both his way and his goal, then he need not err in that way.

The first Scripture is in the Old Testament (Isa. 66):

"To this one will I look," i.e., I will let *my eye* rest on him now with complacent approval and affection; though I may have to turn away from everyone else; though there may be but a single one amid the mass, yet I will not forget or overlook *him*. Oh, who is it, Lord?

The wise, the intelligent, the gifted? No.

The rich, the noble, the reputable? No.

The one of untiring activity in public ministry? No.

The one who can attract large crowds, and is popular with the worldly church of today? No.

Then who is it?

"To him who is *poor*;" who knows it, owns it; makes no claim, either in lip or heart, to being rich in any way or sense. Well, at least, it is not difficult to be *poor*, is it? To confess that one is personally involved, and bears a full part in the saddest failure and most deplorable condition of the Church as a witness on earth that has ever been — that's the safe thing, and His blessed Face shines on that.

"And is of a contrite spirit," that is, so busy with self-judgment, and that is the very opposite of *claiming* to have "*done right*," that he lacks time to judge others; too conscious of his own need of mercy not to show it to his brethren.

"And trembles at My Word," that holy Word that is being profanely criticized, denied, nullified, ridiculed, or neglected by the insensate mass of professing Christendom. This poor

one does not trifle with it, does not use it to display his own superiority in any way; but *trembles* at it himself.

This is the one whom He will not strike, nor rebuke, nor even *reproach*, but to whom He will *look* letting all the beams of His warm love fall on *him*.

Yes, self-judgment ever has His approval, and is "*right* in *His Eyes*." There is no change as to this through all dispensations; at the beginning or the end; for nations or individuals; in all places — north, south, east, or west. Ever he that humbles himself is exalted, whilst he that exalts himself has the solemn assurance of abasement sooner or later.

Just for one last Scripture in the New Testament:

"If anyone hear my voice." Note the same strong individuality. Not any *assembly*, any *church*, any *company* or *confederacy*. We are past all that now. It is now a question of individual knowledge of the Lord Jesus; if *any one*, any *single one*, anywhere, hear My voice.

But what is it to hear His voice, except to take right home to oneself, as a witness for Him on the earth, just what He has been saying, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" To own from the heart what is simply the truth of our condition when brought to any true standard; say the early days of the Church as seen in the Acts. Yea, even compared with the day of lowly Philadelphia, when those whom He led out into that place of blessing, seventy-five years ago, when He looked on them with approval, were characterized, not as now by claims to having done right, but by *self-judgment and confession of their own part in the general ruin*. Let but the same heart-lowliness, characterize any single one now, with regard to the public testimony of the Church, and, all barrier gone, the door of self-sufficiency,

that has so long kept Him out, opened, it gives Him such delight to come in and commune, that He calls it His "*supper*." "I will come in to him and sup with him and *he with Me*."

Is this difficult? Is it some high attainment? Cannot anyone be (not pose, or assume to be, but *be*) *poor*? Surely this is not beyond any of us, even to the end.

Thus, dear fellow-believer, we will say farewell to one another, as far as our fellowship over the pages of this book goes, with these gracious words of our Savior-Lord in our ears. May they be fulfilled in both reader and writer for His Name's sake.