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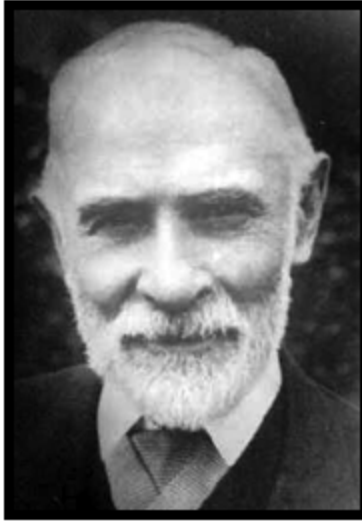
V06 Outline of Joshua,
Judges and Ruth

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JOSHUA 1

Joshua 1

The book of Joshua does not, like the book of Deuteronomy, open up to us the wealth and blessedness of the land of Canaan or describe the enjoyment by God's chosen people of their inheritance. It is essentially a military book. The first half of the book is occupied by the wars of Jehovah, and the people are spoken of as the army of Jehovah; the latter half describes the division and occupation of the land by the tribes of Israel as a result of the conflict. This has a present voice to us, for none of us can enter into our inheritance apart from conflict; we do not hold anything for which we have not engaged in battle.

Joshua now is the prominent figure, and he is looked at as subordinate to Moses; he is spoken of more than once as Moses' attendant. There is a remarkable statement as to the disciples in the opening verses of Luke; they are described as "eye-witnesses of and attendants on the Word". That qualified them to take up the Joshua character of things. Joshua represents the most important spiritual reality which we need to lay hold of in view of moving into the land. I do not think he represents Christ personally — Christ personally is at the right hand of God — but he represents the Spirit of Christ found in leadership amongst the people of God.

It is interesting that it should be said that Joshua as a young man remained in the tent of meeting; it seems to indicate his training. Joshua appears first in Exodus 17 in connection with the conflict with Amalek; he appears there in a military connection. He gets the victory over Amalek, who represents Satan working through the flesh in a violent way to resist the Spirit. The Spirit had just been given typically in the water from the rock, and now we find the action of the power of evil to resist that, but there was spiritual power in Joshua that enabled him to overcome Amalek. There was a good general in the field. Joshua's first experience was to learn how to overcome the hostility that there is to the presence and action of the Spirit in the people of God. In Exodus 34 we find him as a young man not departing from the tent of meeting. The tent of meeting was pitched outside the camp; it was a very unpretentious thing. It was not yet the tabernacle, but an informal structure; nevertheless the presence of Jehovah was there, and Joshua would not leave the tent; he remained in the secret of God's pavilion. He is seen as at home in nearness to God. We see him in two characters — on the field of battle with the enemy, and then abiding in the place where Jehovah was; and he is

Moses' attendant. He seems to represent that spirit which would mark the saints as having known the company of the Lord.

I think God would touch our hearts by suggesting to us that we have a Joshua, we have an element of spiritual leading, and it lies in the Spirit of Christ. God would encourage the Spirit of Christ in His people, so He says, "Be strong and very courageous", and the people say to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous". The Joshua element was very powerful in both Paul and Timothy. Paul encouraged that spirit in Timothy all through his epistles. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus". That would bring in the Joshua element, so that there might be spiritual leading amongst the people of God, something that God could support. God commits Himself absolutely to Joshua.

The Spirit of Christ is intensely set on bringing the people of God into everything that the love of God has purposed for them. That is the element amongst God's people that God would encourage and strengthen. It is most encouraging to me to think that there is that on this earth at the present moment to which God can unreservedly commit Himself — that is the Spirit of Christ in the saints. It is a wonderful thing to recognise that there is spiritual power adequate to cause us to inherit all that God has given us in the purpose of His love; that is the element we want to strengthen and encourage. It is said in verse 5, "None shall be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not leave thee neither will I forsake thee. Be strong and courageous, for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I have sworn to their fathers to give them". God will never leave nor forsake those who are formed by the Spirit of Christ. He could not. It is because the saints are viewed as partakers of the Spirit of Christ that this scripture is quoted in Hebrews 13, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". We must read the epistle to see the kind of people in view; it is those who are the companions of Christ. If I walk after the flesh it would be profane for me to think that I could have the abiding presence of God with me. It has often been said of this scripture that it occurs three times in the Old Testament. It is said to Jacob in Genesis 28; it is said here to Joshua; and it is said to Solomon. Paul applies it to the sanctified company, the holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling; God never leaves them or forsakes them. The Spirit of Christ gives strength and courage that prepares one to suffer, to be outwardly weak, to go to the wall, but it is a spirit that can overcome every obstacle in the way of taking possession of the inheritance. The apostle Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me", Philippians 4: 13.

It is a great thing to recognise that the saints are identified with the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ is identified with them, and God commits Himself absolutely to support that Spirit. If I move in the Spirit of Christ, I have the unreserved support of the blessed God. Our comfort as saints is that we are moving in concert with the Spirit of Christ, and God is with that element, as He says here, "Jehovah thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest". Whithersoever the Spirit of Christ leads, God is with that leading. It is a very great exercise for us that we should see what it is that God can strengthen and encourage. If we are moving on the line of the spiritual leading of Christ, there is a living divine support, a victory over every foe; nothing will be able to obstruct us from entering into the inheritance.

Two things come out here in connection with which Joshua is exhorted to be strong and courageous. The first is the coming into the land: "Be strong and courageous, for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I have sworn to their fathers to give them", verse 6. The second is, "Only be strong and very courageous, that thou mayest take heed to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded thee. Turn not from it to the right or to the left that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart from thy mouth; and thou shalt meditate on it day and night, that thou mayest take heed to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt have good success in thy ways, and then shalt thou prosper", verses 7, 8. There are two things: the bringing into the land, and the taking heed to the book that is written. Those are the two great actions of spiritual leadership in the saints. The Spirit of Christ would always lead into the purposes of God's love; and on the other hand the law would be preserved in all its integrity, and the book that was written. Spiritual leadership is wholly governed by the written word. The law is most important because it is an element of divine control, and the Spirit of Christ would always magnify that in our hearts — the spirit of control. The commandments of the Lord are always to govern us. They are explicit and authoritative; they are to govern us, and the land will not be enjoyed otherwise. It is a test now of spirituality that the things that are written are acknowledged to be the commandment of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14) — that is how we know a spiritual person. A spiritual person always recognises the commandment of the Lord, and the Spirit of Christ in the saints can never be out of correspondence with the commandment of the Lord. Joshua was never out of accord with Moses; one could not think of such a thing. The law is part of what God has made known; every scripture is inspired of God. There is a remarkable reference to a book here, and reference to what was written. There is something explicit about it. People say, I think this and that, and I believe this or that, but the point is

what is written, not what I go with. The Spirit of Christ will always give heed to what is written. If a brother says he knows he has the mind of the Lord, he subjects himself to the enquiry of the saints as to whether it is in accord with the Scriptures.

We read in verse 2, "Now rise up, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people". The whole people are identified with Joshua, and Joshua with them. It is an element of spiritual leading which every saint is privileged to recognise and give place to; and we can only recognise that in another as we have the same kind of thing in our own spirits. There must be that in ourselves that is in harmony with any light that God gives. When God gives light there is often great opposition and resentment, which shows that there is not that practically in the saints that is in correspondence with it. We are tested by any spiritual leading that there is amongst the saints; but, if I am giving place to the Spirit of Christ, I shall greatly appreciate and respond to what is of the Spirit of Christ wherever it is found. If there is any measure of true separation, there is an element of spiritual leading; it might be in a brother or sister, and it is a great thing to have that element strengthened and encouraged.

This book opens by calling attention to two important things. It is said in verse 4, "From the wilderness and this Lebanon to the great river, the river Euphrates, the whole land of the Hittites, to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border". That gives the whole scope of God's purposed blessing for His people on both sides of the Jordan. Paul tells the Christians that all things were theirs, and they were unspiritual people too. "In everything ye are enriched in him" — he spreads it out before them, "That shall be your border", an unlimited expanse; and all those of whom the Spirit can witness that they are children of God can say, That is our border. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, so the whole expanse of it is ours. The border includes everything on the privilege side and on the responsible side — both sides of the Jordan — the whole expanse of divine blessing in Christ. All is ours. But there is something else beside that. In verse 3 we read, "Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread have I given to you" — that is another matter. This refers to personal exercise and movement. "The sole of your foot" means that your feet have moved. While everything belongs to us, we only have as much as we have taken possession of. It is wholesome for us to remember that. The question is, What have I put my foot on? We would all accept as true that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ; we are all thankful to hear Paul tell us that all things are ours, and we believe it; but there must be a movement with Joshua "thou and all this people". If they had not moved with Joshua they would never have put their foot on a piece of the

land. The question comes to each of us, How much have we put our foot on it?

Joshua and the people are all identified; and as they followed and moved with Joshua they overcame one enemy after another. Every fresh piece of land they possessed involved marching and fighting. They did not put their foot on the land in five minutes: they had to move with Joshua. Now the question is, How far have we moved under the precious leadership of the Spirit of Christ? How far have we moved into the inheritance so that we are conscious that we have put our foot on a certain piece of ground? That is the idea. Every fresh tract of land, as they moved on, meant fresh fighting and fresh victory, but there was that among them in Joshua that was able to overcome every foe.

It is an interesting fact that they never did possess all the land, and we know as a matter of fact that Joshua did not give them rest. Hebrews 4 tells us that he did not. The thing is left open, as it is today; there is very much land to be possessed. We are left in the exercise and encouragement of that. We have not possessed very much land; we have not put our foot on a great deal.

Joshua does two things here. First, he tells them to prepare victuals, which shows that a starving people cannot go over. It is a people that can prepare themselves victuals. Some of us have not reached that yet; our spiritual food has to be prepared for us and put into our mouths with a spoon. The Corinthians were spoon-fed people; they did not know how to prepare themselves victuals; but after Paul's second epistle to them they knew how to do it. If there is to be movement there must be energy, and there cannot be energy without food. That is why there is so little energy today amongst the people of God; they are so badly nourished. The Lord has set those over the household to give them their portion of meat in due season. The apostles have done their duty well; they have provided us with meat in due season for every possible emergency. There is a food supply in the ministry of the apostles, and also a perpetual food supply in the ministry of the gifts. There has been a living ministry going on for nearly two thousand years; the people of God have been fed and nourished all that time. In the dark ages even, many beloved saints lived and died in the confession of the truth; in the dark ages there was a food supply which kept up energy and ability to do something. The food supply is very important. Often difficulties and local troubles come in because the food supply is short: the remedy is a little more food.

Then there is the other side that he speaks of. The unspiritual people, the two and a half tribes who had stopped on the wrong side of Jordan, are spoken to about going over with their brethren. Joshua reminds them of the universal character of the conflict which is connected with the inheritance. It is a lesson

for us. We may have rest locally, but the conflict is going on, and no one in Israel is to settle down as long as the conflicts of the inheritance are going on. It is a great help to feel that, though I may not be eminent spiritually, yet I am called to take part in the conflicts of the inheritance. I think that is what Paul is referring to when he says to the Corinthians, "Quit yourselves like men; be strong" — he was calling them out to military service. And he says to the saints at Philippi, who were spiritual people compared to the Corinthians, "stand firm in one spirit, with one soul, labouring together in the same conflict with the faith of the glad tidings". Everybody is called to take part in the conflict; no section of the people of God is exempt from military service.

JOSHUA 2

Joshua 2

This chapter is of great importance as coming at the commencement of this book. It would intimate to us that if we are to possess and enjoy the land we must have Rahab's faith and Rahab's works. This is a particularly interesting chapter to us because it shows how the Gentile comes into possession of the land. It is most remarkable, and must have struck every one of us, that we should have a chapter like this at the beginning of a book like this. Before we have any of the triumphs of Joshua and the army of Jehovah, we have a moral triumph which is greater than any of the military triumphs. I suppose the greatest victory recorded in the book is the victory of divine grace in the soul of Rahab. All those who form the household of faith, viewed as in the land, belong typically to Rahab's house. Rahab's household is the household of faith.

I think we see here the marvellous working of God in the very place where the enemy is strongest, for I suppose Jericho would represent that, and it was the strongest part of Jericho, for Rahab's house was on the wall. We see here one in the strongest part of the enemy's stronghold, and such a one as she was, a disreputable woman, for the New Testament reminds us each time she is mentioned that she was Rahab the harlot. How this magnifies the sovereign mercy that could act in such a place as Jericho, and in one of the worst women in Jericho, and so work in her that she becomes the mother in Israel of her day! It is interesting to see that the spies that Joshua sent did nothing else, as far as the record goes, but take knowledge of the work of God in Rahab — not the strength of the enemy, but the mighty power of God that could work in the strongest part of the enemy's territory and secure such a triumph for Himself.

We read in Hebrews 11 that Rahab received the spies with peace. It must have been an astonishment to those spies to find a person in Jericho to receive them with peace. The fact was that Jehovah had become her God; their God was her God unquestionably. I have no doubt she was beyond many in Israel, because she was the one person who had a divine outlook on the situation. When the spies came back to Joshua they reported Rahab's outlook on the situation. It is very remarkable that Rahab's faith seems to be connected with how she received the spies, and her works are connected with how she dismissed them. We have to learn these two lessons; we have to learn spiritually what it means if we are to estimate the present situation aright.

The spies represent the two-fold character of the mission of the Spirit. The mission of the Spirit today has a two-fold character: He is here as a spy and He is here as a messenger. Hebrews 11 calls them spies, and James 2 calls them messengers. Now the Spirit of God has come in that two-fold character: He is a spy to seek out and expose all the power of evil in this world. "He will bring demonstration to the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe on me; of righteousness because I go away to my Father, and ye behold me no longer; of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged", John 16: 8 - 12. That is the Spirit in the spy character; He searches out and exposes all the condition of the world in its opposition to God, in its Jericho character. On the other hand He is a messenger; He brings messages of blessing to all those who fear God. So these two men were spies in relation to Jericho, but messengers in relation to Rahab, divine messengers of grace and blessing; and the Spirit has that character for all who fear God.

"They came into a harlot's house, named Rahab". They came to her as messengers, and as spies she received them in peace. Rahab was quite in accord with the judgment that God had passed on the people to whom she had belonged; she is in harmony with God and His people about it all, so she received the spies with peace. There was perfect harmony between Rahab's spirit and the spies. What a wonderful thing that God could bring that about in presence of all the power of Satan and the world! He could bring a soul into harmony with His Spirit's work as to all that is in the world; He can do that in the sovereignty of His mercy. There is a great deal involved in it. Typically she entered into the death and resurrection of Christ, she could speak of what God did at the Red Sea, and then of what the people did in the overthrow of Sihon and Og. She understood typically what God had done through the death and resurrection of Christ for His people as seen in the Red Sea. And she understood what He was in the power of the Spirit in His people in overthrowing the flesh. She had an estimate of it all, and she says, "That people shall be my people; I will link myself with them; their God shall be my God; I no longer belong to Jericho or to Jericho's king; I belong to those people". She received the spies with peace. Rahab shows how God in His sovereign mercy can separate a soul from this present evil world viewed as the sphere of spiritual activities of evil. Jericho represents this world as a sphere of the activities of spiritual evil, all kinds of wrong thoughts and teachings which emanate from wicked spirits in the heavenlies. God can work in such a scene and dissociate a soul completely from it; He did that for Rahab so that she had no longer any thought of being a friend of the world.

It is very wonderful that James should put Abraham and Rahab together. He selects them purposely. There is so to speak, a father and a mother. He brings

them together: the great august vessel of promise, Abraham, in all his dignity as the great father; and then a poor harlot, Rahab. They are both the subjects of the same sovereign calling, and the same sovereign working. So Abraham and the harlot stand both together, different vessels, but the same working and the same treasure put in each one. I may be a very respectable man like Abraham, as far as this world goes, or a most disreputable person like Rahab — that is only the vessel. What matters is what God puts into the vessel, and that is faith. God puts faith there; God put it into Abraham and He put it into Rahab. It is faith that distinguishes a person with God; not the vessel, but what God puts into the vessel.

The work of God in that woman's soul had completely detached her before the messengers came. Jehovah was her God and Jehovah's people her people, so that when the spies came she received them with peace. She was in harmony with what was outside the city, and in complete separation morally from what was inside the city. That is the position for us today. As a matter of fact we are still in Jericho, but we are there as completely dissociated from everything morally of Jericho; and our interests and hopes are all connected with what is outside the city. I wonder if we have reached that point? If not, it is not much use reading the rest of the book. This chapter is the gate into Joshua, and if we have not Rahab's faith and Rahab's works we might as well shut the book. It is just as important for us to be justified by works as by faith; one is just as important a truth of Scripture as the other. Faith is nothing if it does not result in a changed outlook; you must have not only a door but a window. Rahab had a door, that is faith; but she had a window, that was her outlook; her faith was connected with her door, but her works were connected with her window. We must all have a door, there is no blessing without a door. Rahab received the spies, that was her door; but James tells us that she put forth the messengers another way, that is the window. She put them out of the window. A window is the outlook. The fact was that Rahab's door was on the city side. We find later on that the door was to be opened to let anybody in who liked to enter, but there was to be no going out of the door; if any one went out of the door his blood was on his own head.

It is wonderful to pass through the door of Rahab's house; that represents the household of faith in Jericho, and once through that door there is no going back to the city. All your hopes and aspirations after that become connected with the window; that looks outside the city. Some of us have a window on the wrong side of the house. This incident is one of the most striking connected with the household principle. It is not here a head of the house; she has a father and mother and brethren and sisters, and she claims them all for the blessing of God; it is very fine. Her faith was a household faith, which

not only judged Jericho for herself, but she must have everyone connected with her in the same judgment.

It was salvation to come in, and faith is like the door. "By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with the unbelieving, having received the spies in peace" — that is connected with her door. To separate oneself, to have a door between you and Jericho, is a fine thing. It is a door that only opens one way; it opened to let in her father and mother, brethren and sisters. Everybody who had any kinship with Rahab could come in, and no one but those who had kinship with Rahab could come in. Am I one of Rahab's kinfolk? Have I the same kind of faith as Rahab, that will judge the world in its strongest and most impious form, separate from it and identify myself with God and His people and all God is going to do for the honour of His Son? That is Rahab's faith. It is fine to see that she claims the blessing for her kindred; we are told that they all came in and identified themselves with her faith.

Lot did not save his house; he escaped himself but so as by fire. Alas! many are like that, Christian parents who secure the blessing for themselves and leave their children outside. It is terrible to think of a Christian parent being content to know he is going to heaven and not to be concerned whether his children are going to hell. It is awful, to put it plainly. Yet how many Christian parents there are who take no care that their children should walk in the same path as themselves; they neglect the spiritual welfare of their children. One has known parents full of thought and desire and energy to look after the physical and worldly benefit of their children, who perhaps never read the word with them or pray with them, never take them aside and pray with them or speak to them of the Lord. What can they expect? Rahab's care was not only for herself but that every one connected with her should look at things as she did. How could any of us rest if we had relatives who did not think of things as we do, and feel about things as we do? Should we not pray night and day, labour and do everything we could to bring them, so to speak, inside the door?

Rahab is a fine example of the kind of spirit produced by the sovereign call of God, and by the working of God in the soul. Jehovah was her God. She said, "He is God in the heavens above and in the earth beneath". She had finished with the gods of Jericho, and all her hopes are connected with Jehovah and His people. She realises that God is kind and powerful, so she asks confidently for kindness. What a knowledge of God she had! She had been brought up all her life in the midst of gods who were intensely cruel, who were marked by the grossest forms of inhuman cruelty; but now she has a thought of a God who is kind and whose people are kind. What a revolution it would make in

her soul! Her window now looks outside the city! Now our works are connected with our outlook — that is a fixed principle. What my outlook is determines the whole character of my spiritual life. What is my outlook? Rahab had not the slightest interest in anything in Jericho; her window looked outside the city in the direction of the people of God.

People think of making the world better; they have their window on the wrong side of the house. What is outside the city? The ark of the covenant, the people of God, Joshua and the priests. The ark of God is coming in to take possession of the land. Rahab looked out in that direction, so she put forth the messengers by another way. They came in at the door, but they went out by the window; she let them out of the window by a cord. Is not that suggestive? She linked herself personally with those two men by a cord. There was a very firm personal link between her and the two men; when she let them down by the cord it spoke of the fact that she linked herself in her affections definitely and firmly with the people of God. If Rahab had not been drawn with cords of love she would not have had any reason to link herself with the people of God and with the servants of God; she definitely linked herself with them when she let them down by a cord, and the men never forgot it. They said, "Thou shalt bind in thy window this line of scarlet thread by which thou hast let us down".

Scarlet is a colour connected with the rights of Jehovah in Israel. Rahab acknowledged that all rights were there, and she put it in the window. It is her public confession that all the rights were not with the king of Jericho, but with Jehovah. He has the right to dispose of the land as He wills according to His good pleasure. She confesses it publicly; that is her outlook. She puts it in the window. At the present time our outlook is that in a very brief moment every other power is going to give way to the kingdom of our God and His Christ. That is our outlook and confession; not exactly to the world in this connection, but our confession is such as the people of God can take account of. There is an aspect of confession that the world can take account of, but there is another that the people of God can take account of. I do not think that Rahab puts up the scarlet line for the people of Jericho to see, but for the people of God to see. In Matthew they put a scarlet robe on Christ; in mockery they invested Him with the moral dignity of the Christ. Rahab in type confesses that; and whatever you confess you get the distinction of. She is not only saved, but Salmon marries her and Boaz is her son; she comes into the royal genealogy as the mother of God's anointed. In putting up the scarlet line she confesses before the people of God the royal rights of God. It is like God to bring in the Gentiles to possess the land, and to possess it as in the royal lineage. The history of Rahab is wonderful.

“She put them forth another way”. It is a fine thing when we turn from the door to the window. If we are only thinking of our own blessing we are thinking about the door. How many thousands of God’s people are thankful to have a door who have not considered the window. What is your outlook? Daniel had a window — his outlook was towards Jerusalem, though it was only a heap of ruins; it was to him the city of the great King. Rahab’s window opened towards the people of God as they were in God’s mind; it opened to all the purposes of God. The spies learned from Rahab; they did not need to examine the fortifications or to count the enemy’s soldiers. Rahab’s faith was enough for them, and they went back to report the outlook of Rahab. There was not a word about the king or his chariots, or anything else, but they reported the situation as it appeared from Rahab’s window. What they reported was on the spiritual side. The ten spies that Moses sent said the cities were walled up to heaven, but what does it matter if the wall is to heaven if God has taken possession of it? God took possession of the wall when He took possession of Rahab; her house was on the wall. If God has taken possession, what matter how high it is? When the walls came down flat, that piece stood, so the spies went in and brought all Rahab’s household out.

Rahab’s hiding the messengers is a secret from Jericho. We do not give away our secrets to the world. She came into the position of a traitor to her own people. We cannot be among the people of God without being traitors to what goes on in this present evil world. If I am a friend of the world I am an enemy of God, and if I want to be a friend of God I am a traitor to the world. You cannot imagine Rahab putting the spies out of the window and keeping up communication with people inside the city. She was justified by works — she had transferred her allegiance from the king of Jericho to Jehovah, so she becomes a traitor to the king of Jericho and she hides the spies. She has her secrets and we have ours.

This chapter is a most important one morally, and especially for us Gentiles, because it sets forth in a striking way the calling and work and grace of God in a Gentile. The whole work of God is concentrated in Rahab.

JOSHUA 3

Joshua 3

The people now move with Joshua, and they are called to lodge three days before they go over Jordan, which suggests a preparatory exercise in connection with important spiritual movements. I do not think God would have His people act, as it were, on the spur of the moment; He would have us consider what we are doing, especially in relation to spiritual movements, so that we do not act on sudden impulses. We act with consideration and conviction.

As we see in chapter 1, three days were allotted for the preparation of victuals. "Prepare yourselves victuals, for in three days ye shall pass over", it suggests that food is an important element in connection with that spiritual movement which is set forth in the crossing of the Jordan. It is a spiritually nourished people, not a starving people, that go over Jordan. Then the three days suggest the preparation of their hearts, the preparation of our hearts, to understand what the crossing of Jordan really means. The Lord spoke of three days: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up", and He spoke of being three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. "Three days" is an important period. When the light of heaven shone into Paul's heart there were three days of preparatory exercise; there were three days in which he could not see and in which he did not eat or drink. There must have been deep exercises going on in his soul, but that was a necessary preparation for the new movement that he was about to make. I do not mean to say that in his case it was going over Jordan, but it was preparation for a great spiritual movement; he was about to move entirely out of the region of the flesh into the region of the Spirit. No doubt the deep exercise of the three days was needed in order that he might fully appreciate what he was going to move out of and what he was going to move into. I think the three days were always present to the mind of the Lord. At the beginning of His ministry in John 2 He speaks of "after three days", showing that the thought of passing over to the resurrection side was much before Him at the very beginning of His ministry.

At the end of three days it is suggested that the people are prepared to fix their eyes on "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God". They are prepared to consider Christ personally, and to "remove from your place and go after it". This spiritual movement all depends on the place Christ secures in our hearts as the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, because it is a question of following Him — "go after it".

I think John 1 of the gospel of John is very suggestive in connection with this. The Lord Jesus is first seen as the Lamb of God, the Taker-away of the sin of the world — that is the sacrificial question which had to be settled first, and then comes the personal question. The second time John speaks he says, “Behold the Lamb of God” — it is the Person, and they follow Jesus; He is walking. It seems to me that the Spirit of God would suggest in that chapter that the Son of God is moving from what is sacrificial, what is connected with the dealing with sin, to the region of what is spiritual and eternal, so I think it directly answers to the crossings of the Jordan. He is moving over to the other side. The sacrificial side is on this side — that is finished — and He moves over and the disciples hear John speak and they go after Him. They follow the ark.

We have to take account of the fact that the people had had the ark in their midst and leading them for thirty-eight years. God’s intention is to make Christ as the ark of the covenant very precious to us. That is what He has been about with us from the first moment when a ray of gospel light shone into our souls. We were thinking of our salvation, forgiveness and blessing, but what God was thinking about was connecting our affections with that Person who brought salvation, forgiveness and blessing to us. He is the ark of the covenant; all is secured in Him and presented to us in Him so that we might learn to value and love that Person, and be deeply interested in His movements.

Then there is the wonderful presentation of Christ in the epistle to the Hebrews. It is to move us in our affections to the place where Christ is, to move us from earth to heaven. We may listen to ministry for long, but that does not set us in movement. We have often been reminded of that wonderful discourse in Luke 24 to which the two disciples listened, the most wonderful ministry that any one had ever heard. The whole of Scripture was opened to them by the Son of God, but it never turned their feet round. The ministry and exposition of Scripture did not move them, but when they had a sight of the Person, that moved them. He was leading them along a road which ended in the revelation of Himself in resurrection; He brought them to a point when they only needed one other touch: that their eyes might be opened and they might know Him. Many of us need that other touch. They saw the ark then. Nothing else will give us to understand what Jordan is but appreciation of Christ. We should ponder the gospels more; it would have a great effect on us if we pondered them in the only place they can be pondered, that is, in the holiest. There is no other place in which to read the gospels but in the holiest. If we want to read them spiritually according to the divine mind they must be contemplated in the holiest of all, because the gospels present the ark to us.

The different titles of the ark which we find in these two chapters answer to the gospels. In verse 11 of this chapter it is "*the ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth*". No doubt that answers to the gospel of Matthew, where the nations are in view; it is the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth. We have the universal rights of Christ in Matthew. Then chapter 4: 15 reads, "And Jehovah spoke to Joshua saying, Command the priests who bear *the ark of the testimony* that they come up out of Jordan". The ark of the testimony answers to Mark, where we see the testimony of God presented to man in His Servant-Son. Then chapter 3:5 reads, "When ye see *the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God*". I think that answers to Luke, where we see the marvellous presentation of the grace in which God can be known to man in His covenant. There is the full expression of the grace of God to man in Luke, which answers to the ark of the covenant. Then chapter 4: 11 reads, "When all the people had completely gone over, *the ark of Jehovah* went over". The ark of Jehovah answers to John's gospel. I think one would expect that there should be space made in the type for every aspect of the ark. Every aspect that Christ fills is presented in the four gospels, the complete presentation of all that is secured for God and man in Him as the ark. And, as I was saying, the proper place to contemplate it is in the holiest; that is where we can see the ark of the covenant. We have an advantage over Israel. The types do not give the completeness of the divine thought; they are only shadows, not the image. The children of Israel in the wilderness never could enter the holiest. The difference between them and us is that all the time we are in the wilderness the privilege is open to each of us individually at any time to enter the holiest. What to do? To contemplate the ark. That was the only thing seen in the holiest — the ark and the mercy seat (which was the cover of the ark). If we go in, there is nothing else to see but the ark. Inside the ark were the covenant and the testimony: that is, there is a perfect setting forth in the Person of Christ of all that God is in grace manward.

Luke presents the grace of God manward. Everything has been secured in a Man; God can present it to men as secured. If He says, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" — why did He say it? He would have been a blasphemer if it had not been secured. It is secured in the rights of His Person. So with every blessing — man is not only set up in forgiveness, but in power, satisfaction, divine complacency and complete fitness for paradise. Christ is the ark of the covenant, and all is secured in His Person; so it all comes, not as demand, but as supply. It makes one love Him. You go into the holiest and contemplate Him and you love Him; and as you love Him you are prepared to follow Him wherever He moves. If he goes through Jordan you want to go too. Nobody

will ever go through Jordan until their affections are indissolubly bound up with the ark of the covenant; no other power can take us through Jordan.

The immediate gain of the covenant in Hebrews is that it sets us free to enter the holiest. He tells us in the covenant, "Giving my laws into their hearts I will write them also in their understandings; and their sins and their lawlessnesses I will never remember any more ... Having therefore brethren, boldness for entering into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus ..". The first effect of the new covenant is that we approach in Christ; we have boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter the holiest. It does not say anything about coming out; the object of the Spirit is to move us to go in. The holiest is open to us individually; but, if we all assembled as having been in the holiest individually, what wonderful meetings we should have!

We do not want these things to be mere notions that we have gathered up from the Bible: we want to know the verity and reality of them. God has been working with many of us for many years, and all the time He has been imparting to our souls some sense of the preciousness of Christ as the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth. He has been showing us that all rights belong to Christ, the kingly rights and all rights of proprietorship. We have been learning slowly that every divine right is vested in Christ, and the kingdom of this world is soon to be His. We have learned too that Christ is the ark of the testimony; everything that God has presented to men in witness He has presented in Christ — He is the complete testimony. Then the grace of God, the full measure of it, is set forth in Christ in Luke's gospel. It is perfectly wonderful — one could contemplate it for a thousand years and not see all the glory of it. Then John answers to the ark of Jehovah; it is God Himself in His own nature telling Himself out in His beloved Son. It is not now the rights of Christ, or the testimony, or the grace of God in Christ, but it is God Himself declared and made known in His beloved Son. As we contemplate that, our affections are bound up with Christ as the ark, so that, as He moves, and moves through Jordan, we are prepared to follow Him; there is no other way of going over.

We are not here occupied with our responsible history, our sins. The sacrificial side of the death of Christ deals with that. God has been glorified about all I have done, and all that I am; the man of offences has been removed in the death of Christ — that is the sacrificial side. But there is something further. It is a question of entering into an entirely new position and new state that never belonged to man, neither to man in innocence nor to man fallen. It is a new state and position which never had any existence until Christ rose from the dead. The death of Christ was necessary for that. No man could ever have

entered that new state, so as to live in it for the pleasure of divine love, if Christ had not died. That is the aspect of the death of Christ set forth in the Jordan, and no one will ever learn death in Jordan character except from the gospels. I do not think that the epistles will in themselves ever teach us the Jordan aspect of the death of Christ; we must learn that from the gospels.

The wonderful thing is that it was in the days of harvest when the ark went into Jordan: that is, the full power of death was never known or could be known until the time came for God to give fruition to all the thoughts of His own love. God has in view the securing of the fruition of all that is in His own purpose of love for man, but that is brought to light through the power of death as it was never known before. The power of death was never fully known until the Son of God went into death. The days of harvest and the Jordan overflowing all its banks go together. What a sense the disciples must have had when they realised after Pentecost, as they never did before, the power of death as they had learned it in Christ! What should we think if we walked in company with a Man who could speak the word and raise the dead! If we walked in company three and a half years with a Man who only had to touch the bier and speak the word and the dead were raised, what should we have thought if we had seen that Man go into death? Nothing in heaven or earth could give us such a sense of the power of death! That is Jordan overflowing all its banks. It gives us another thought of death altogether. Man dreads death. Why does he dread death? The reason for it is simply this, that every man realises, though he may not put it into words, that death is the end of the action of his own will. Death is the final termination of the action of creature will — that is why man dreads it.

When we come over Jordan we have another thought. That is, there is a region which faith can contemplate where there is nothing but the will of God, where there is all the delightful product of God's love, a region filled with the things which divine love has prepared for those that love God. What a blessed thing to contemplate! The way into that region is only through death. So death in the light of Christ's death is not simply the termination of creature will, but entry into all the blessedness of God's will for man. The ark goes that way. What a sense the people must have had of the power of the ark! It had accompanied them in their movements in the Wilderness; they had been typically learning the blessedness of it; but now they come in view of the full power of death. Can the ark deal with that! They had to learn that the moment the feet of the priests touched the water the whole presence of the power of death is removed. You will find if you look on the map that the waters stood in a heap twenty miles away; they did not see a drop of water.

We have to realise what was there in His Person; we could not bear to contemplate the power of death if we did not realise the greatness of Christ.

I have often wondered why it was that, in all the questions the disciples asked the Lord when He was here, they never once asked Him about the power of death. It just shows that man who is not specially taught of God does not realise the power of death. You may depend on it that, if the disciples had realised it, they would have asked Him; but the thought in the disciples' minds was that He only had to take His rights and His place and reign in Zion gloriously. His title was all right, and He had power enough to do it, and had come from God to do it. What about Jordan? It never came into their thoughts. It is a solemn thing that the necessity for death comes very little into our thoughts. I believe we do not realise the solemnity of it. It would greatly intensify our affection for the Lord if we contemplated more the greatness of that power which was set forth in the Jordan overflowing all its banks. If we did so we should come to the Lord's supper with reverent and chastened spirits; there would be a tone about the morning meeting that would be indescribable. But we do not realise the greatness of the power that the Lord met, and our affections are often feeble and superficial.

The priests were the first to go in and the last to come out. They set forth the holiness in which the thoughts of God are carried out, the priestly character in which Christ entered into death. They are necessary in the type to present the glory of Christ in this character. The Spirit of God makes the ark very prominent, and also puts two thousand cubits between the ark and the people. Association of the people with the ark comes in after. The first thought presented here is that there should be two thousand cubits distance between the ark and the people. It is Christ personally and the way He has gone in priestly holiness, and the distance between Him and the people is not to make Him obscure, but that there may be a clear view of Him. There was to be a certain space by which they saw the way so that they went over with a clearer view. If we consider John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1, we find the two thousand cubits between the ark and the people. We see Christ in His pre-eminence, in His solitary and unique grandeur, in His ability to meet all the power of death. We see all that glory in Him, and there is no question of the saints being in any way connected with that. It is His glory alone, but after that the people can go over.

JOSHUA 4

Joshua 4

The Red Sea speaks of the death of Christ as the ground of separation from the world, and the ground of justification, so that as outside the life of Egypt we might know what it is to be justified and stand with God on the ground that Christ has died and been raised for us. But Jordan has in view our having a new place, and that new place is according to His place. There was no ark in the Red Sea, but at the Jordan. The complete power of death was met by the ark.

It is interesting to notice that at the end of the gospels it is not said that God raised Christ; we do not read at the end of any one of the gospels that *He was raised*. He died and *He is risen*, we read. It suggests the inherent power that was there in Himself. We have a similar thought in Hebrews 1: He “set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high”. It is the inherent power of that Person. Within the compass of His Person He could make purification of sins and “set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high”. It is His own act, because it is His personal greatness that is brought out; He is great enough for that. It is not said here that God set Him there, though we have that lower down in the same chapter — God says, “Sit at my right hand” — but at the beginning of the chapter He sets Himself down. So in the end of the gospels it is said. “*He is risen*”. It suggests the power that there was in His Person. It is like what the Lord says in John 2, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”, and in John 10, “I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again”. It shows His complete power over death; we see death in its full force overflowing all its banks, but there was power in that Person great enough to cut it all off. He has cut off the full power of death. As God magnifies that Person before our hearts, there will be something set in movement in our souls that will lead us to follow Him: He has marked out the spiritual way for us to go. It is not His taking up need on our side, but He has taken up the thoughts of divine love, and He has been into death in order that every one of those thoughts might come into fruition.

In this chapter the twelve stones taken out of Jordan are the prominent subject. There was to be a perpetual memorial. The stones represented all Israel; there were twelve stones, taken up by twelve men, a man out of each tribe, and, though the twelve stones had been handled by twelve men, yet it said in verse 8, “And the children of Israel did so, as Joshua had commanded” — showing that it was done representatively. The first reference to these stones is connected with Christ personally. “When your children ask hereafter,

What mean you by these stones? then ye shall say to them, that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; when it went through the Jordan the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever", verses 6, 7. That is, it has reference to what has been effected by the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; the waters of Jordan were cut off before it.

This type is of supreme importance. It pleased God that there should be a memorial set up here in the witness of the twelve apostles to the death and resurrection of Christ. There is the abiding witness of the apostles to the death and resurrection of that Person with whom they were so well acquainted. It was the Man with whom they were personally acquainted; they had companied with the ark and learned the value of the ark. They had seen how He could act in every circumstance of human need and weakness. They had followed the ark and had been in His company, not only in the days of His flesh, but in the days of His resurrection until the day He was taken up. They had eaten and drunk with Him in resurrection they could give a powerful witness to His resurrection. He has completely annulled the whole power of death in its overflowing force; He has met it all and cut it all off. The waters of Jordan have been cut off — that is the basis of Christianity.

What comes out in this chapter is the typical instruction of these stones; the people are not exactly a type now, but the stones are. God sets forth the truth of the position in these stones; they are set up in permanent form for the instruction of all Israel, and we are the children so to speak, the persons who have to ask the questions and learn the instructions of the stones. We are not like the first generation who knew all about them. The apostles knew all about them, they are like the fathers; but we come along as the children and have to ask questions and get answers and learn what the stones mean. "What mean these stones?" Things have been set up in a permanent form in the witness of the apostles to Christ; it is a complete change in the apprehension of everything. I feel for myself how little one apprehends the extraordinary change produced by the death and resurrection of Christ! What a change in the thoughts and outlook of the disciples! They had followed Him in the days of His flesh; they had heard His words and seen His works; and they had some kind of idea of the blessedness that was there. Then they had seen Him go into death, and now they find Him in resurrection in a new condition for man altogether, and in an entirely new place. Consider the witness of it! The witness of a Man in a new condition outside the life of flesh and blood, outside life in this world altogether. They are the witnesses of the Christ of God, of the ark in its victory over all the power of death as seen in the Jordan. There is a testimony set up which has its bearing towards all Israel, and towards the

whole people of God, and it should affect the people of God profoundly. I do not think that God ever intended that the children of Israel should understand these things; it is written for our learning, that we might understand.

Gilgal was the base of operations. If there is to be any campaign the first thing is to establish a base of operations, where you lodge, where you move out from, and which you return to. This is a military book, we are in a military atmosphere, and Gilgal is the base of operations. The first characteristic of Gilgal is that the twelve stones are set up there; it is the testimony to the victorious power of Christ over death.

Joshua first says in chapter 3: 12, "Take you twelve men", and then in chapter 4: 4 he calls them. I think it shows the sovereignty of the call into the place of witness. The place the Lord has given to the witness of the apostles is wonderful. He says that the Comforter should be a witness. We can understand that, but right alongside the witness of the Comforter, a divine Person, He says, "And ye *too* bear witness, because ye are with me from the beginning", John 15: 27. He puts them in the place of witness alongside the Holy Spirit. That is the fruit of the sovereign call of God. So Peter says in Acts 10, "God ... showed him openly ... unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead". What a distinguished place the apostles had in their witness: they could say, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us", Acts 15: 28. They were men who could put themselves alongside the Holy Spirit. There is the twofold character of witness; the witness of the Holy Spirit and the witness of men.

We learn to love the Lord through the testimony that has been brought to us by men who walked in company with Him. We have the testimony of men who walked with Him, men with whom He came in and went out. If we are influenced by the testimony of the apostles our affections will be bound up with that Person and we should be prepared to follow Him through death to resurrection. If we have gone as far as that with the twelve we are ready for Paul's ministry. It is not that there is any conflict between the testimony of the twelve and the testimony of Paul, but Paul adds to it. When Joshua sets up the stones he does not refer at all to the ark of the covenant, but he says, "On dry land did Israel come over this Jordan", verse 22. It is "because Jehovah your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you until ye had passed over", verse 23. It is not here how the ark cut off the power of death — that was more a direct reference to Christ personally — but Joshua calls attention to the fact that all the people had passed over. I think that corresponds to the Spirit of Christ in Paul.

Paul laboured very much. In writing to the Colossians he was setting up the stones in Gilgal. It is the testimony that all the people had gone over. In writing to the Colossians he tells them of his intensity of labour: "combating according to his working, which works in me in power", Colossians 1: 29. There was divine power working in Paul towards the saints. He says, "I would have you know what combat I have for you", and he speaks of the things he agonised for, and the danger of their being diverted from them. He goes on to speak of their being buried with Christ in baptism and their being raised with Him, "through faith of the working of God who raised him from among the dead", Colossians 2: 12. Paul was bringing them to see that all the people were to go over as well as Christ. If I accept the testimony of the apostles that Christ has gone over into resurrection, that will prepare me in my affections to understand that all the people must go over. The whole of the Israel of God must go over, not only a part of Israel. What a rebuke it must have been for the two-and-a-half tribes when they saw the twelve stones set up at Gilgal; not nine-and-a-half stones set up, but twelve stones. It is the mind of God that every one of His people should be risen with Christ, and faith does not take any other estimate of the people.

The act of the twelve men represents typically the witness which God set up in men to the death and resurrection of Christ — that is the witness of the twelve. Then the action of Joshua in setting up the stones answers to the ministry of Paul, teaching the saints that according to the mind of God they are risen with Christ. But when we see Joshua putting twelve stones into the bed of Jordan — there was no command for it — it is an action which is supposed to take place in the souls of the people of God as led by the Spirit of Christ; they are led to take the place of having died with Christ. We are never told in any single passage of Scripture that we are to be dead with Christ. We are told, "If ye have died with Christ", that certain things must follow, but we are never told we are to be dead with Christ. We have to be spiritually prepared to be dead with Christ. Am I prepared to be led by the Spirit of Christ and to put stones into the bed of Jordan? They are to be there to this day — any day when we like to read it. It is an action of spiritual affection; as led by the Spirit of Christ the saints are prepared to take up the ground of being dead with Christ. We are never told to do it, it is an intuitive action of spontaneous affection. If the saints were all regulated by the truth of being risen with Christ, it would have a marvellous effect on every one in this world. The fact is that Satan has taken away the stones so far as he can, and the memorial has not had its proper effect on the people of God. We have to see to it that it has its proper effect on us — complete separation from the world in every aspect. We want the affection that goes in for it.

JOSHUA 5

Joshua 5

The kings of the Amorites would no doubt represent those powers that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 6; he describes them as great dignitaries: "Our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies". This first verse tells us that, when they "heard that Jehovah had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until they had passed over, that their heart melted, and there was no spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel". Rahab could speak of all He had done at the Red Sea — typically what God had done in the death and resurrection of Christ for His people. And she could speak of Sihon and Og, representing the victory over the flesh gained in the power of the Spirit in the saints. Now we have something further: there is a power operating to place the people of God in figure on the other side of death altogether.

Even on the shore of the Red Sea the children of Israel could sing of complete redemption. When they spoke of the inhabitants of Canaan, they spoke in a past tense: "All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away", Exodus 15:15. The language of faith is according to the language of God; God calls things that be not as though they were, and faith does the same. If God takes a thing in hand in the Man of His right hand, whom He has made strong for Himself, it is all absolutely assured from the outset, and we shall not need to wait for it to be actually accomplished.

The greatest power that the devil has is the might of death; and, if that is annulled, and annulled in such a way that the people of God can pass over to the other side, and actually live as risen with Christ beyond death, that is the sure pledge that every power of evil will be overthrown. These powers know it too; they know that they are about to be overthrown. How wonderful is the mighty power of God in raising Christ, and in raising His people with Christ! That is the great exhibition of divine power. "Jehovah will do wonders among you". "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you". It is the greatest operation of divine power. If we look at Christ, there is no question at all but that death has been annulled. You may say, Death is not annulled, for people are dying every day, but if we look at Christ we see that death is absolutely annulled. It expended its power, it overflowed all its banks against Christ, and there was not a drop of water left. He is a risen Man and death is annulled; it will never touch Him any more.

He has “annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings”, 2 Timothy 1: 10. Paul was speaking of Christ; it is the glad tidings and they tell about Christ, about a Person who has been in death and annulled all its power, so that I might have part in all His victory. It is not only that He died for us; that is the Red Sea. But in Jordan He has gone into death and annulled its power so that we might be with Him, dead with Him and risen with Him.

It is in view of association with Christ, and all the powers of evil can do nothing; they are powerless against a people risen with Christ, and they know it. The only hope they have is that some element of failure may be introduced among the people of God to rob them of their power, and that is what they are working for. They could not touch us as risen with Christ; they are powerless, so they try to introduce some element of failure to take away our true power and leave us exposed to their attacks. If we stand on the ground where God has put us, and where faith has put us, there is not a power of evil but would melt away. It is wonderful to have such a Person who is absolutely victorious.

He is the Captain of Jehovah’s army; He comes with a drawn sword in warlike character to be Captain of Jehovah’s army. But He must have a suitable army, so this chapter is like the drilling of the army. The first thing is that they all have to be circumcised. It is the preparation of the people of God as being now on heavenly ground. This chapter is like the training for the conflict. Circumcision has a very important place. I suppose here it is circumcision in the Colossian aspect. The man that the enemy can handle has to be got rid of, not only in his bad features but in his good features; that is, what appear to be good features.

Paul speaks of this to the Philippians: “We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in flesh”, Philippians 3: 3. He goes on to tell us his good points. “If any have cause to trust in the flesh I more — circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee” — it was all what a good man he was. But Paul was a truly circumcised man.

It is striking that Jehovah says, “Circumcise again the children of Israel the second time”. He calls attention to the fact that it had not been done as it ought to have been done the first time. Circumcision should come properly early in Christian life; that is the normal aspect, but if neglected early it has to be done a second time, abnormally if not normally. We often have to do things again. Paul says to the Galatians, “My children, of whom I travail in birth again”. It is a serious thing when anything of God has to be done again. It is

striking that they had not done it, and God does not seem to have raised the question in the wilderness; it suggests that in the wilderness it was not an urgent question. It shows how far we may go, and how much evidence we may have of God's delivering power, His salvation, His gracious care over us, and His giving us power to overcome our enemies. There may be a great deal and yet something vital neglected. Sometimes the goodness and favour of God makes His people careless. They had neglected circumcision all through the wilderness, and it was vital because it was a sign of the covenant. They had no title to consider themselves the people of God apart from circumcision. When it comes to be a question of the land and of overcoming the powers there, circumcision becomes of primary, vital importance.

The apostle addresses the Colossians: "See that there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the teaching of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and authority, in whom also ye have been circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Christ", Colossians 2: 8 - 11. Circumcision there is from the standpoint of being complete or filled full in Christ. If we apprehended that we are filled full in Christ, we should not want the good man any more than the bad man. We should not want the philosopher, or the man of high moral standing, or the man of ordinances. We do not want him because he is not Christ, and we are filled full in Christ.

From the standpoint of being filled full in Christ we do not want a contribution from the man after the flesh; that is the first lesson in the land. The flesh must be cut off as a source of contribution. It is not only the bad flesh; everyone can see how desirable it is to get rid of bad flesh. Everyone in the world could appreciate the abolition of drunkenness, the reform of the criminal classes, teaching men to have refined tastes and to follow refined pleasures. To create a high standard of moral conduct is the teaching of men, and we have to be delivered from it by circumcision. It is a sharp knife to cut off the man in the flesh in his best aspect. It is not the man who gratifies the lust of his flesh, the lawless man, the man who is dominated by what is evil, vile lusts, and self-gratification of a dreadful character — that is Romans — and any one can see that man will not do. But what about this absolutely perfect man to whom everyone looks up as a model of high moral standard, who is religious, who carries out obediently all God's ordinances — what about that man? The cross settles it all. It is astonishing how long we can go on and yet retain some value for the man after the flesh on the good side. That man must be cut off;

otherwise there will be an element of the world about us, and an element of the world is the reproach of Egypt.

I do not think the reproach of Egypt means reproach before men, but it means what is reproach before God. It is a reproach on His people before God if there is a single element left that is of the world, "the teaching of men" or "the elements of the world". When people talk of the world, they think of theatres, picture palaces and all that kind of thing, but the world in Colossians is the religious world, the world of ordinances where you will be regulated to a nicety — what you do, what you touch, what you handle — that is the world. Any element of that kind is a reproach on God's people; God wants it rolled away, and He does it at Gilgal. If you see a person well brought up and that has everything that is nice about him, it is something to learn that it is all worthless. "Man at his best estate is vanity", because he is not Christ. If that man could be allowed, you would have man in the flesh occupying a place which only Christ can fill for the pleasure of God. The saints are filled full in Christ — if we are, we do not want any other contribution.

When circumcision has taken place we should be able to hold the passover with quite a new apprehension of what is involved in it. The passover was the starting point, showing that God takes up His people from the very outset in the value of the death of Christ. It widens out before us as we go on; we get a deeper and a wider sense of the value of the death of Christ. We are not given any detail of this passover, only that they held it. We do not leave the passover in Egypt, nor yet in the wilderness, but it is carried on to the land. As we go on we have a fuller sense of the death of Christ as that which was before God from the very beginning. Peter dwells on the preciousness of the blood; it is a question of the value of redemption. "Knowing that ye have been redeemed, not by corruptible things, as silver or gold, from your vain conversation handed down from your fathers, but by precious blood as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world", 1 Peter 1:18. Peter carries them back to God's purpose. When God instituted the passover in Exodus 12, He told them that they should keep it in the land, showing that in the passover God had the land in view. He had a ground on which He could preserve His people from judgment, and carry them through the wilderness and put them in the land. The death of Christ in passover aspect has freed God to carry His purpose through to the finish.

The passover comes before they ate of the old corn of the land, and gives a sense of the cost at which God had taken His people to Himself. Paul emphasises it: he speaks of "the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own", Acts 20:28. We have to think of what the passover

was to God; it was "the blood of his own". It was God coming out to secure His people for Himself; it is all from His side, even in Exodus 12. The moral order here is very instructive: circumcision first, then the passover, then unleavened bread and the old corn of the land. Unleavened bread is connected with the Passover; it would be in relation to the scene of inflation and corruption. There is the perfect contrast to it in Christ. The old corn of the land views Him in relation to purpose.

The thought in "roasted" is that everything has been fully tested. It suggests that Christ as known in the condition of purpose — the fruit of the purpose of God, grown in the land and harvested in the land — is not to be separated in the heart from the thought of how fully He has been tested in every possible way. There has been the action of fire. The unleavened bread would preserve freedom from all that inflation which marks man. Keeping the feast of unleavened bread according to 1 Corinthians 5 is an elementary exercise; It is what the saints should be prepared to take up from the beginning. If we have something which has the character of meal, and elements are brought in which corrupt it and give it inflation and make room for the flesh, it is very dreadful in the sight of God.

The manna ceasing shows what an entirely new sphere of life is contemplated. The manna goes over Jordan; they had been living on it at the time they were circumcised, and at the time they kept the passover. The manna did not cease on the wilderness side of Jordan; it went over Jordan, which is striking, and shows that circumcision and the passover in the land are taken up in the power of the grace that comes down from heaven. Manna suits certain exercises up to a certain point, but then it ceases. When we come to what is connected with purpose, we are outside that sphere. We see the purpose of God which is outside all the wilderness needs; there are no needs there. The thoughts of God all come to fruition; all have been harvested in a risen and glorified Man. We are privileged to feed on that — the old corn — and apprehend God's purpose of love and His own delight in a Man in a new place and condition. The conflict of the land can only be taken up by those who eat the produce of the land — they ate the produce of the land that year.

The thought of conflict is introduced with the man who appears with a drawn sword. Joshua is a soldier himself, so he does not entertain any thought of neutrality: "Art thou for us or for our enemies"? When we come to the conflicts of the land it is impossible to be neutral. Neutrality is a base expedient; and the Spirit of Christ as leading the saints would never entertain any thought of neutrality — it is one thing or another. When it is a question of the pleasure of God in regard to His people, and of the overthrow of all that is opposing, we

cannot think of a neutral position. In principle everything is either favourable to the people of God, or it is hindering them.

“As captain of the army of Jehovah am I now come”. It is the people viewed as Jehovah’s army. It is to bring out the kind of spirit that is suitable for the conflict. Joshua had to take the sandals from off his feet. The place is holy, and spiritual conflict can only be taken up by those who have unshod feet. It is a lesson we need to take to heart. We shall never put our shoes on in that sense if we have not known first what it is to take them off according to this chapter. It is the effect in the soul of the apprehension of holiness — a great lesson to learn.

JOSHUA 6

Joshua 6

How important it is that the walls of Jericho should really come down for us! It is of the deepest importance that we should have a spiritual estimate of things. If we do not judge the Jericho system it will dominate us; we need to see the real truth of the position.

Jericho stands on divine territory; it represents the power of the enemy in the spiritual sphere. Egypt represents the world system in connection with its resources, its wisdom, and its ability to manage its own affairs. It has wonderful resources. We read about the wisdom of the Egyptians, men very wise in the conduct of their affairs, as the Lord says, "The children of this world are wiser than the children of light". Wisdom and resource in regard to the affairs of men are one thing, but to set up a power in what one might call divine territory is another thing. The powers in the land of Canaan are powers holding divine territory that belongs to God, and holding it in insubjection to God. The walls of Jericho are the defence of a system that exists to keep people from being in subjection to God. All through the history of the people of God there has been a power hostile to God and that power must come down; it is bound to come down. All the strength and the defence of it, its greatness and pride — it may be walled up to heaven — must come down. Here God means it to come down by faith; it will come down at the appearing of Christ. If it does not come down before, it certainly will then, but God's thought is that it should come down by faith. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, having been encircled for seven days", Hebrews 11: 30. It is a question of faith; and what answers to this chapter is a certain triumph of faith to be effected in our souls at the present moment. The whole secret of the power lay in the people being identified with the ark and moving with the ark. All the power was the power of the ark; as far as the people were concerned they did not strike a blow. The priests in this chapter are of more importance than the soldiers. The ark is of all importance; neither priests nor soldiers would have been of any use without the ark, so they had this remarkable week of spiritual education.

In the Acts of the Apostles we see how every power that existed had to come down, and every power that held the Jericho system was shaking. Peter, John, James, Stephen, Phillip, and Paul were all men of faith, and they were priests. They were good soldiers too, but it takes something more than a soldier to bring walls down; it needs a priest, and all those men were priests. The priest is a consecrated man, a man wholly for God; the holy anointing is upon him.

The thought of holiness is suggested at the end of the previous chapter — if the Lord comes in as captain of Jehovah's army, what must characterise the people, looked upon as led by the Spirit of Christ, is holiness. There must be an entire absence of neutrality; Joshua had no thought of neutrality. "Art thou for us or for our enemies" — there is no neutral position. Then he takes his shoes off because the place is holy. There is uncompromising decision on the one hand, and personal holiness of intense character on the other. A man in that spiritual condition is qualified to hear the voice of Jehovah. We cannot hear the voice of Jehovah merely by reading the Bible; many think they can get God's mind and direction by reading the Bible, but they will only get it by being spiritual. Of course the Scriptures are our great safeguard, but I am pressing that a man might read the Bible and never get a ray of spiritual light. Many an unconverted man spends his life reading the Bible and studying it. Many of these unconverted doctors of divinity know more about the Bible than we do; they know every verse of Scripture and have studied it in the original, but they have no light; they are as dark as midnight. There must be spiritual conditions. The Lord says repeatedly, "He that hath an ear let him hear" — there must be conditions in the hearer; there was condition in Joshua. The Spirit of God says through John, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies". If I think I can hear what the Spirit says without regard to my spiritual condition, I deceive myself. I must have an ear first; that is the spirit of obedience. The Scriptures will not do me any good without the spirit of obedience in my soul. The ear is the characteristic feature in a man's body. Man thinks about his hand, his feet and his brain, but what God delights in is his ear. The Lord came into this world saying, "Ears hast thou prepared me", Psalm 40: 6. The basis of what is spiritual is the spirit of obedience. We need to be very much exercised about our state; that is largely the subject of Joshua 5. We have the army in training in Joshua 5, and the army in the field in Joshua 6. There are certain spiritual features that must have their place in the people of God as preparatory to going into action.

We see what the falling of the walls of Jericho means when we consider what went on in the soul of Paul. In the soul of Paul the walls of Jericho were down. There are seven priests with trumpets, they go on before the ark, and they are able to give a certain sound, a loud, clear, penetrating sound. Speaking typically, every note of the sounding out of those seven trumpets spoke of the glory and power of the ark. They went before the ark and sounded out the glory and power of the ark for all Israel to hear. I do not think it was for the people of Jericho to hear. There are two instances in the chapter, and in both cases it was for the people of God to hear. This is a question of battle — "If

the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for war?" 1 Corinthians 14:8. The trumpet has to do with war.

Here it is a question of the Jericho system being fully estimated. We have to go round it, and keep on going round it seven days, and then seven times in one day. They had to estimate the strength of every bulwark, tower and gate all round; every part of the city was taken account of, but they did it in relation to the ark; they went round it in company with the ark. I believe God would have us go round Jericho and take stock of the whole strength of the Jericho system; He would have us to estimate it all, but to estimate it from the standpoint of being in company with the ark, in company with the Person before whom it will all come down. All must come down before the ark — it is a spiritual education.

At the beginning there was a clear sounding of trumpets. Sounding the trumpets is a priestly work, not the work of soldiers. It says in Numbers 10, "The priests, the sons of Aaron, shall blow with trumpets"; it is priestly work. They are consecrated men; they have the garments and the anointing on them. We are often content with what we have in us; we are conscious that we have the Spirit, but the fact that we have the Spirit in us is not our qualification for service. Qualification for service is the anointing; that is something poured on you. If you look on the priest on the day of his consecration you will see the oil on him. As a matter of fact it ran down to the skirts of his garments; everybody could see that he was an anointed man. The anointing is external; it is what people can take account of. They cannot take account of the Spirit in my heart, but they can of the anointing, that I am moving, and speaking, and serving in a holy power in which there is no admixture of anything of mine. Can people take account of our service like that? The Lord could say in Luke 4, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me". If we read Luke and look at the Lord externally, we shall see the grace of His movements and of His words; even those who did not know Him had to marvel at His gracious words. Why? Because He was in the power of the anointing. "God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went through all quarters doing good, and healing all that were under the power of the devil, because God was with him", Acts 10:38. There was the grace of the anointing. A priest typically is a consecrated and anointed man, and what you see externally is the evidence that there is a power and grace there that is not of man. Stephen's very countenance was luminous with celestial light, really the light of the anointing. At the end of Luke the Lord speaks to the disciples and says, "Remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high". He does not say, Stay there until you are given the Spirit to be in your heart — that is internal — but He

says, "till ye be clothed" — it is external. The internal is important, but the internal alone will not qualify for service.

There is a sounding out here, God provides seven priests and seven trumpets. There is a perfect sounding-out in a clear and definite way of the power of Christ as the ark, before which all the strength and defences and glory of the Jericho system must come down. God would march His people round the city until they had faith; it took seven days to bring the people to the faith of what God was about to do. God did not bring the walls down by the action of His own power; He waited until there was the power of faith in His people to bring them down. God could have brought the walls down the first day, the moment there was the sounding of the first trumpet; but that was not God's object. His object was to educate the people into this by bringing their souls into the faith of it. So He says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down". It was not alone by the power of God or by the ark, but by faith. God has great pleasure in faith, because faith always says, "Glory all belongs to God", and faith makes everything of the ark.

Jericho is an imposing city, and we are all naturally influenced by the imposing character of it. Jericho represents the mind of man at work in the sphere of spiritual things. It is a great thing to keep where the Spirit of God can sound out through spiritual men, through priests, the glory and the power of the ark. If we are in company with those seven priests we can go round Jericho day after day; and on the seventh day we can go round seven times, and survey everything that is great and pretentious in the mind of man, and we can look at it all in the light of the power and authority of the ark. It is all coming down.

The ark here sets forth the power of Christ entirely to set aside every working of the natural mind, even in relation to spiritual things. There is one aspect of things connected with fleshly lusts — all those things which work on the line of self-indulgence or self-exaltation in connection with natural things. That is like Sihon and Og, self-indulgence and self-display. We have to get the victory over them on the east side of Jordan. But when we come into the land we find the exaltation of man in connection with the moral and religious sphere, and Christendom is full of it. In Acts we see the walls all down; we see what answers to Joshua, the priests, and the trumpets going round the city, and the effect is that every power that influenced men morally is brought down. But it was not very long before Jericho began to be rebuilt, and there cannot be any result for God in the building up of Jericho; so this man who built the city hundreds of years after left no posterity for God. He laid the foundations in his first-born — he lost his first-born, and he sets up the gates in his youngest —

he lost his youngest when he finished it. He cut off his own posterity for God; that is the effect of building up Jericho. Everyone who does it cuts off his own posterity; there is no abiding result, no fruit for God, there is only the setting up again of that which is accursed.

We see how the mind of man is glorified today. One of the most magnificent buildings in England carries the inscription, "There is nothing great on earth but man". If you go round to the other side you read, "There is nothing great in man but mind". That is the walls of Jericho. Have they come down for us, so that man and his mind is utterly discounted? Nothing is of value, nothing has glory or power in our estimation but the ark of the covenant, nothing but Christ. Before Christ all is seen to be contemptible and offensive that belongs to man; it is utterly judged in the cross of Christ — the walls have all come down. Am I impressed with the great mental ability of man, by the wonderful knowledge he has, even of Scripture? All that has to come down; there is to be nothing but Christ.

It is important to see that there was that in Jericho which belonged to God. The silver, gold and copper all belonged to God, but they had been incorporated in the Jericho system, and had to be rescued from the system in which the devil had incorporated them: they had to be restored to their proper place in the treasury of the house of Jehovah. There are things in the Jericho system that belong to God; every right conception that man has is of God, but they have the conception connected with the wrong man. Every conception that has moral or spiritual value is of God wherever we find it. We find men preaching wonderful moral conceptions, and perhaps even spiritual thoughts — all these things belong to God, but in the Jericho system all is linked on with the wrong man, and utilised to give distinction and glory and honour to the wrong man, not to Christ. Now God is going to rescue every thought that has divine value from the Jericho system. God is going to bring down that system, but He does not forget that there is gold, silver and copper that has divine value, and He is going to rescue all that and put it in His treasury. It is blessed to know that all these thoughts that in Christendom are connected with the man after the flesh are going to be rescued by the power of God and connected with Christ. When the walls come down and the city is devoted to destruction, all these elements that are of God are rescued and put into the treasury of God.

Rahab is a beautiful expression of what one would call the moral victory of God. He could go to Jericho and secure a household for Himself; He could separate a woman and her household altogether from the system which He was going to overthrow; and He could give her a door which spoke of faith

and a window which spoke of works. The greatest victory that divine power wrought in Canaan was not over the seven nations but over Rahab's heart; that is why she is put in the forefront of this book. God places her, a Gentile woman of base character morally, in the inheritance in the genealogy of Christ, and makes her the most distinguished mother in Israel. It shows the magnificence of the sovereignty of mercy. We cannot mix the types, but we see in Rahab the wonderful character of divine victory; she is not content to be blessed herself, but she would have every member of her household blessed, so God secures a household of faith in the strongest part of Jericho, on the wall of the city. In the very stronghold of the enemy's power God secures His own witness of what He is doing today. The walls of Jericho have not actually come down yet, but they will come down, and when they do God will take the household of faith clean out of Jericho.

JOSHUA 7

Joshua 7

We have been looking a little at the irresistible power of the ark in relation to Jordan, and in relation to the walls of Jericho — a power so great that nothing can stand before it. I suppose the enemy very soon realised that his only chance was to corrupt the people of God in order that the power of the ark might not be practically available. We can see the power of the enemy at Ephesus; the walls of Jericho had fallen at Ephesus with a tremendous crash, but the enemy went to work in a subtle way to displace the ark in the affections of the people of God, so the Lord had to say that they had left their first love. If the ark lost its place in the affections of the people of God, as happened with Achan, the end must be the extinction of the light.

We have considered the spiritual education that the people had for seven days going round Jericho in company with the ark, and listening all the time to the priestly trumpets sounding continually. They were to learn by this to take account of all the world power, but to take account of it in relation to Christ — the ark — so that at the end of the week they could shout. When we have had a spiritual education, we have to pass our examination at the end of the term. That is a fixed principle with God; there is always a test. If there is a special ministry of Christ among the people of God, He will send a test. God will give seven days of education, a full term, and perhaps His people will learn to shout; but sometimes we shout before we have reached in our hearts what we are shouting about. Achan perhaps was shouting, but he had not in his heart what he was shouting about. If he shouted it was in response to the priestly trumpets, and they no doubt announced the glory and the power of the ark. It is one thing to shout in response to the priestly trumpets — to appreciate current ministry and shout in response — but it is another thing to have the power of it in one's soul. The test comes, the examination day comes, to see whether we have learned our lesson, whether we have it in our heart. If there has been a precious ministry of Christ in priestly holiness and power, and the people of God have been educated to the point of shouting in response to an enemy fallen publicly, we may depend on it the enemy will suddenly change his tactics and make another move, a more subtle move, because it is a move in the affections of the people of God, a corrupting move in their affections. Achan's sin brought to light that he was not in his own spirit governed by the ark. He had been following it, perhaps shouting with it, but in his own affections he was not governed by the ark.

Ananias and Sapphira are the Achans of the New Testament; when the examination day came they had not learnt their lesson. They wanted to clothe themselves with the ornament of great devotedness to Christ. They wanted to have the credit amongst the people of God of a devotedness which was not in their hearts — that is a Babylonish garment. One could not be on that line if one was governed by the ark. If we see the wonderful place that Christ has as the ark, we should be in harmony with the Spirit of Christ as expressed in Joshua. Joshua had said that all the silver and gold were to be held for Jehovah, and they were all to be put into the treasury of the house of Jehovah. Now that was the mind of the Spirit of Christ, but Achan was quite out of tune; he took the silver and the gold and added it to himself. It was a gross act of unfaithfulness; it was robbing God.

He had not apprehended the stones in the bed of Jordan. A man who had seen his place in the bed of the river, and put himself there, would not want a goodly Babylonish garment — he would not want to connect a single divine thought with himself as a natural man. I suppose the silver and the gold represent what has value with God, though it may be incorporated with the Jericho system. There is an immense amount of silver and gold in the Jericho system today. Men have taken almost everything of God and used it to enrich and beautify the Jericho system; all the light of Christianity is taken to enrich the Jericho system. Here we see that principle of using things for the exaltation of the natural man, the man after the flesh, introduced into the heart of Achan. It is not Jericho with its towering walls in view objectively, but it is the Jericho system set up in the heart of an Israelite; and that is a worse kind of Jericho than the other. It is a very solemn thing to take up what is of God and use it on the Jericho principle. It is possible for us to take the truth of God and use it to glorify ourselves instead of seeing that everything that has divine value must go into the treasury of the house of Jehovah. Everything precious must be connected with Christ and must stand connected with the saints as Christ's body.

The mystery of God is the treasure now, because in it "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge", Colossians 2: 3. Every piece of silver and gold, everything of value and excellence which God can attach worth to, had to go into the treasury; and, particularly in this type, all the things which men have stolen from God and appropriated, or misappropriated, and used for their own glory. In christendom divine truth is connected with the wrong man, and man has used it to magnify the importance of that man who is under the curse of God. We have to see to it that we are not in some way setting up that man, or connecting things with that man, instead of connecting things with Christ,

connecting ourselves and all the brethren with Christ. The sectarian principle brings in something that is not Christ.

The point here is the universality of the thing; it says, "The children of Israel committed unfaithfulness in that which had been brought under the curse ... and the anger of Jehovah was kindled against the children of Israel". As we know later in the book, Joshua says, "Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing? and wrath fell on all the assembly of Israel, and he perished not alone in his iniquity", chapter 22:20. It shows the peculiar bond which God recognises in His Israel, that what one man did actually involved all Israel. None of us are independent units. If the element of unfaithfulness is introduced, even if it only comes in in one man, under the eye of God it characterises the whole people until they judge it.

It would be good for us to consider how the assembly is involved in the action of one person. We may think that we can hide things in our own tents, and nobody will know anything about it. But what we have hidden in our tent, some thought or desire to have something connected with ourselves as living in the world, has an effect under the eye of God upon the whole assembly. It is a searching exercise. Things come to light in the assembly; if there is a principle of unfaithfulness, God will bring it to light. Any unfaithfulness in Israel must be judged; otherwise Israel would cease to be the Israel of God.

In verse 11 every detail done is attributed to Israel: "They put it among their own stuff". It shows us God's way of looking at things. We might have thought that if there was only one person unfaithful, it was his own affair. The Lord said at the Supper table, "One of you", and the exercise was taken up by them all; they all said, "Is it I?" Each apostle took up personally the exercise, whether he was the betrayer or not. We need a deeper sense of the bond in which we are set as of the assembly. "Wrath came on the assembly" — it did at Corinth. There was a certain disorder connected with eating the Supper, and judgment came on the whole company: "On this account many among you are weak and infirm, and a good many are fallen asleep", 1 Corinthians 11:30. The Lord judged the whole company for the disorder on the part of perhaps a small proportion. It brings home to every true Israelite the necessity of unsparing judgment of unfaithfulness. No one is exempted; every Israelite had to put his own hand to the judgment of this unfaithfulness.

Even Joshua did not know about it until Jehovah told him. We need spirituality to judge things according to God. Sometimes we have to learn things through sharp discipline. That was the case here; there was no exercise in Israel until they found themselves unable to go on in their victorious way. They found the Lord's support withdrawn, and they were smitten and fell before their

enemies. It must have been a terrible discipline to undergo in Canaan in view of the promises God had given them. It is a principle that, when elements of unfaithfulness have a place with us, we underrate the power of the enemy.

The people had to hallow themselves (verse 13). I suppose it was an exercise in regard to their moral state in view of divine testing. Jehovah was going to find out where the unfaithfulness was, and it called for much exercise. Every time the Lord calls His saints together in assembly, He calls on us to hallow ourselves as to what we have been allowing, what has governed our spirits and ways, and what we have in our tents. If Achan had hallowed the ark in his affections he would have rejoiced to put the silver and the gold into the treasury.

The people had not returned to Gilgal after their victory at Jericho, and that has an important bearing on the matter. We have had some very blessed things before us in this book; and now this chapter comes to pull us up, and to give us searchings of heart whether we have understood what it means to go through Jordan, to be circumcised, to keep the passover, to eat the old corn of the land, and to go round Jericho with the ark. Have we got it in our souls, so that we are commanded in our affections by Christ?

Similar feelings to those expressed by Joshua in verses 7 - 9 often come up in the exercises of the people of God. There is a thought, If we had remained on lower ground we would have acquitted ourselves better. I suppose we all know what that kind of feeling is. But Joshua does not finish with that, he finishes with the thought of Jehovah's great name: "What wilt thou do for thy great name?" After all, whatever failure there might be, the possession of the land and victory over the enemies in the land were matters that touched the name of Jehovah. His honour and His glory stood connected with it. If we apprehended that the glory of God and the honour of Christ stand connected with the full measure of spiritual blessing according to His own purpose, we could not think of being content with anything short of that. It might be easier and we might do better on a lower ground, but faith never entertains such a proposition.

The valley of Achor will be "a door of hope" (Hosea 2:15), suggesting that the remnant will come back by that door in the confession of Israel's state, and in complete judgment of it. It becomes a place of pasturage according to Isaiah 65:10. This shows how God uses every exercise that comes among His people, even though through their own unfaithfulness, and makes it contributory to His own thoughts.

All Israel judged the sin, for they all stoned Achan. That is a principle for us, for any element of unfaithfulness that comes among the people of God has to

be judged by all His people. Whatever has to be judged locally, a judgment is formed in view of all Israel and all Israel share in the judgment, so, discipline is exercised in any locality, the saints there act representatively for the whole assembly, and so as to carry all their brethren with them.

JOSHUA 8

Joshua 8

In this chapter the elements of unfaithfulness have been judged. God cannot go on with His people while unfaithfulness is unjudged, but when the elements of unfaithfulness are judged God can resume His place with Israel and say, "Fear not, neither be dismayed". That is based on the unsparing judgment of unfaithfulness.

It is very striking that the ark never goes into battle again after Jericho. I think it gives the overthrow of Jericho a very important and distinctive place: that is, Jericho stands in opposition to Christ as the ark. We might say the battle there was between the ark and Jericho. The seven days were an educational period; the people had to go repeatedly round Jericho, and take account of its fortifications, the strength of the city and the height of it; and to take account of it in company with the ark, moving with the ark and listening all the time to the priestly trumpets. They went before the ark just as trumpeters go before the king or some great personage. The children of Israel listened to that for seven days, and at the end of that time they had faith enough to bring down the walls of Jericho. In that time they had so learned the power of Christ that all the strength of the world as opposed to Christ must come down.

At Ai, on the other hand, they sought to rely on their own strength. They had to learn their own weakness. The day of triumph had hardly passed before they exposed their own weakness, showing that, like the saints of today, they had not learned their lesson. The first lesson in the land is Jericho, the second is Ai. These two cities are the only two where the detail is given, because they cover the whole conflict for the inheritance. After Ai, Joshua begins formally to take possession of the land, building an altar and setting up the law, pronouncing everything which Moses commanded. It is the formal assumption of the land. Every question was settled. If we learn the lessons of Jericho and Ai there will be no fear of us. In Jericho it is a question of the ark, a question of the introduction of the will of God in Christ. God has introduced Christ into this scene of lawlessness and insubjection, and He will cause every whit of lawlessness and insubjection to fall before the One who came into this world to do His will. That is the way He secures all His rights. The great lesson of Jericho is the securing the rights of Jehovah. Nothing at Jericho is secured for the people; everything is for Jehovah. When we come to Ai it is another question; it is a question of the portion of His people. Those are the two questions which cover everything. If all that is due to God is secured, and all that God has designed to bestow on His people is secured, we have everything

covered. All the spoil of Jericho is for Jehovah, and all the spoil of Ai is for His people. The ark secured everything in the rights of God for the pleasure of God. Then the outstretched javelin is the Spirit of the Lord; the power at Ai is in the Spirit.

It is obvious that there are two great questions connected with Jericho and Ai. The first question is what is due to God. It is due to God that His will should prevail, and Christ came in as the ark with God's law written in His heart — "Lo, I come to do thy will". He brings God's will in, and when God's will comes in the creature will must fall — the two cannot go on. It is our privilege to see the Jericho system levelled with the ground now by the power of the ark. After Jericho it is not the ark; it is the people of God and the men of war. Now the question of spiritual condition in the saints is raised.

If things are dependent on the spiritual state in the people of God, there is something that the enemy can work on, and he works by introducing elements of unfaithfulness. The first human element to be introduced in the book is in the spies saying, "Let not all the people go up; let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai", chapter 7:3 How commendable it sounds to the brethren! The people had to learn to disallow that sectarian spirit which introduced a principle fatal to the constitution of Israel. However nice it might sound, it was a sectarian principle, a spirit independent of Israel, a sectional movement. The people had to learn to disallow that. No doubt we have all noticed how insistent the Spirit is over and over again in saying, "Joshua and all Israel with him". That is, the people had to learn to disallow what was sectional and independent; they had to learn that all Israel must move with Joshua. People might say, Do not let all the people toil there, it is only a little local trouble, only a small affair. But if it is conflict for the inheritance, it is the business of all Israel, and there is nothing local about it. Every conflict in relation to the inheritance is the business of all Israel: if God raises a question at any place which has reference to the inheritance in any shape or form, it is not a local question, it is a universal question; and all Israel must realise that they have to participate in the conflict. It affects the whole assembly, and the whole assembly will be, and is, identified with the fighting in that place.

We see here that, the moment the thing is transferred to the people, there is weakness. As long as it was the ark and the enemy, there was no question, but, the moment it ceases to be the ark and the enemy, it becomes the men of war and the enemy, and we have elements of weakness at once. It is like Paul's address to the Ephesian elders. In the first part we have the ark of the covenant. He speaks of his ministry, repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus, the gospel of the grace of God, and the whole counsel of God. That is

all on the divine side and there is no element of weakness there; all is introduced in divine power in connection with the ark. But then Paul says, "after my departure" — that is another story. Now it is a question of the condition of those who will be left as men of war.

The base of operations was Gilgal, and there had been no return to or going up from there. If they had gone back to Gilgal, speaking typically, they would not have introduced any element of human expediency; they would not have said that two or three thousand was enough.

The stratagem in chapter 8, however, was not a matter of human expediency; it was God's suggestion. Jehovah Himself said, "Lay an ambush". They had become free now and had learnt to judge human elements; they disallowed the principle on which they had acted before, and they are in obedience here to the word of Jehovah. God Himself is the One who plans the campaign; they have only to carry out the plan of campaign as given to them by Jehovah. Human expediency and unfaithfulness, and what is sectional which loses sight of all Israel, are dreadful to God. They went into conflict in a sectional way, two or three thousand, but God says, Take with you all the people of war. We should understand that we cannot hold aloof from or stand out of any spiritual conflict. There is a great disposition to do so; we know the principle of neutrality has been formally declared among the people of God; it has been set up as a principle. It is spiritual wickedness; it is monstrous to think that the people of God are not to move together in the conflict. We should say that all the people of God are to move together in the enjoyment of privilege; if we do, we must move together in conflict. If any conflict arises that has any bearing on the inheritance, every man in Israel must be in it.

The element of unfaithfulness caused great distress to Joshua; the absence of Jehovah's support distressed him greatly, and he lay on his face. He had to learn that some unfaithfulness had come in which characterised all Israel.

A principle of unfaithfulness affecting one individual, if not judged, contaminates all Israel, so that even a spiritual element is hindered. No amount of good will neutralise an element of evil. The evil must be judged, and, as soon as it is, God can go on with His people; if it is not judged, He cannot go on with them. However many devoted and spiritual men there may be, if an element of evil is unjudged, God cannot go on with His people. It is a searching exercise, and shows the character of divine holiness. Joshua was equal to the situation here, and in the chapter before when he got the mind of God. The action of God was restrained, and Joshua, representing the people as led by the Spirit of Christ, has to go through deep exercise, and he and all the people have to judge these unfaithful elements. They have to take Achan

and his house and his ill-gotten gains and burn them with fire and put a heap of stones on them. Then God can resume complacent relations with His people and tell them how victory is to be got over Ai. They had to learn defeat; and the first thing that contributed to it was that they underestimated the power of the enemy. When we get out of communion we always think less of the work and power of the enemy than we ought to. It is very important to take a proper estimate of the enemy, and it is the mark of a good general to rightly estimate the enemy he has to do with. Paul did not underestimate the foe; he speaks of high things, strongholds, and imaginations that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, and in Ephesians 5 he speaks about universal lords of darkness, principalities and authorities. He clothes the enemy with titles of impressive dignity. It was the same with the Lord. In reading the Psalms that are personal to Christ we see that He never underestimated His enemies. In His reference to His adversaries, those who hated Him, all these Psalms show what a just estimate He had of the power of the enemy.

Human power is absolutely futile; it can do nothing. The smallest bit of the enemy's power is too much for me. Ai was a tiny place, but it was too much for them. If we think we are a match for the enemy's power we shall be defeated. Nothing will meet the enemy's power but the work of God in His people and the action of His Spirit — those are the two lessons of Ai. The work of God in His people is the ambush, and the action of the Spirit of Christ publicly is the stretching out of the javelin; and the two answer one to the other.

Satan can imitate light; he shows himself an angel of light, but he cannot imitate life. He cannot imitate what is wrought of God in the souls of His people; everything in conflict depends on that — that is the ambush behind the city. God meets the enemy in a way that he never expected — by His work in the souls of His people. That always baffles the enemy. Light does not baffle him; often the greatest adversaries of the truth are those who have light. Joshua represents the Spirit of Christ. Jehovah's word was, "Set an ambush", and Joshua obeys Him. He arose and took all the people of war, and he chose thirty thousand valiant men. The suggestion is that God hides what He does from the enemy; He works secretly in a way that the enemy does not suspect. I believe that represents the work of God in the souls of His people which the enemy never anticipated. It is expression in life, what is vitally wrought. Job had to meet the power of the enemy, but the enemy found elements in Job that he never expected to find. The ambush was there, something wrought of God, hidden from the enemy. Satan says, Do this and that and Job will curse you — he did not take account of the work of God in Job's soul.

It is a blessed thing when elements of unfaithfulness are so judged that God can energise His work in His people. His work is always there, but God is not always able to energise it so that it becomes effective against the enemy. The thirty thousand and five thousand valiant men are typical of those in whom the work of God is energised. This ambush is set behind the city; it is something which the adversaries cannot follow; they are not aware of it. When Joshua stretches out his javelin, the two work together; the moment he stretched out his javelin they rose up. What is wrought of God in His people always answers to any public token which the Spirit may give at any moment. I think that Joshua stretching out the javelin towards Ai indicates the public token. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall raise up a standard against him", Isaiah 59:19. There is a public token in the outstretched javelin that was never let down until every one of the inhabitants of Ai were gone. There was something here which was at work to hinder the people of God from enjoying their God-given portion. All the spoil of Ai was to be for the people; all the spoil of Jericho was for God — God's portion comes first. In Ai it was a question of the people's portion; it represents the whole system of spiritual wickedness which stands up to prevent the people of God from enjoying the house of God, its wealth, its food, and its privileges. Bethel and Ai go together. Ai means a heap, and it sets forth the whole heap of things which prevent the people of God from enjoying things. Bethel is the house of God. The two go together, and both are united in this particular part of the conflict. Ai gives the negative side and Bethel the positive side, because it has to do with the portion of the people of God. Joshua said, All the spoil of Ai is for you. The epistle to the Galatians is like Ai; great spiritual forces are at work to rob the people of God of their God-given portion. It is met by the work of God in the souls of His people. Paul says, "I have confidence in you through the Lord". He had confidence that there was a divine work in them. The epistle is like Joshua holding out the javelin. Galatians is a very militant epistle. The work of God answers there to the testimony given, to the holding out of the javelin.

The troubler has to bear his guilt and be destroyed.

The character of Jehovah's land was vindicated in the burial of the king of Ai. God had given a commandment that, if a man was hanged, his body was not to be left there all night. It was to be taken down before sunset; the land was not to be defiled, for it was Jehovah's land. The taking down of the king of Ai and burying him signified that the land was Jehovah's and had to be preserved from defilement, so that God might be worshipped there and honoured in the testimony of His people.

If God gets what is due to Him in the spoil of Jericho and the people get their portion in the spoil of Ai, the whole object of heavenly warfare is secured. The result comes out in the latter portion of this chapter 8; that is, the people are seen in their true place Godward and manward. They are seen as worshippers now; they have been warriors up to this point. At Jericho and Ai they are warriors, but at mount Ebal they become worshippers, and that is the result of spiritual victories.

There seems to be a kind of moral link between the stones in the earlier chapter and the stones here. We have seen the stones of memorial in Gilgal and in Jordan representing all the people of God, but here we have stones put together as an altar. We are not told here that there were twelve stones, but we know that, when Elijah built his altar, he was careful to have twelve stones. The stones represent the people of God viewed from the standpoint of divine purpose and calling, and they are viewed in this type as set together in view of worship. The stones in this book represent the people of God as after the order of Christ by divine calling and constitution; they are not humanly formed; no human tool has anything to do with their formation. They are whole stones, viewed as purely the product of the work of God. The altar here suggests the people of God put together in view of the service of God, in view of the burnt offering and the peace offering, which would be worship. The stones being built together as the altar suggest the saints as divinely set together so that they can become the means by which God is served in relation to Christ, for the burnt offering and the peace offering speak of Christ.

The enemy is overthrown so that God may have a worshipping people, and a people who are a large and fair copy of His own blessed will so that everybody can see it just as they saw it in Christ. So here the ark is brought in, and not only the ark — Christ personally — but a people who stand on this side and that side of the ark, a people morally identified with Christ so that what was true in Christ becomes true in them. What a beautiful spectacle in the land — an altar and a large and legibly written copy of the law! This is a type of what will be brought about in Israel. God will write His law in their hearts and minds; and, if it is written in the inward parts of a man, it will be expressed to his outward parts.

This incident closes the chapter, bringing the matter to a divine conclusion. Jericho has been overthrown; there is nothing left to challenge the rights of God, and Ai has been overthrown — there has been nothing left to challenge the blessing of His people. Now what is the result? There is an altar, a people identified with the ark; and there is an immense tablet on which the law is written very plainly.

It is interesting that the altar was set up on mount Ebal whence the curses came. In Deuteronomy we only have the curses; we are told of six tribes cursing and six blessing, but when we come to the detail of it we only have the curses. That suggests to me that, if we can say Amen to the curses, the blessings will be all right. If we are in harmony with the judgment of God in connection with everything displeasing to Him, there is no fear of us; the blessings will be all right.

We cannot say Amen to the curses and miss the blessings; the blessings practically depend on our saying Amen to the curses. Everything that is under the curse with God is to be under the curse with us; and if we are in that position there is no question at all about the enjoyment of the blessings.

In John 3 we accept the condemnation of the man after the flesh in the lifting up of the brazen serpent — that clears the ground so that there can be spirit and truth in the soul, and worship flows out of it. Worship is more an attitude and appreciation of Christ; they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and according to Deuteronomy 27 they ate together and rejoiced before Jehovah. It is a blessed scene, not only of worship but of fellowship. The burnt offering speaks of Christ as the ground of acceptance with God; we come before God in the joy of that, we are identified with the acceptability of Christ, so that we can speak of Christ to the blessed God out of spirit and truth. On the other hand our fellowship is formed, we can eat together and have common thoughts of Christ, so that the worship Godward and the fellowship of one another go together. If there is no worship there is no fellowship. It is a wonderful picture — the altar set up in the land and the people standing on both sides identified with the ark. It is a profound delight to God to see His people unified in appreciation of Christ: it springs from God's pleasure and goes back to Him.

Joshua "wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses which he had written before the children of Israel". The law is written on this great public tablet big enough for the whole law to be written very plainly. If the people of God were set together according to the mind of God they would be a fair copy of everything that is in the will of God; people would be able to look at them and see that will written practically and livingly on them. I suppose the two things balance each other — in proportion as we have altar character Godward we shall have this stone character manward. If we have divine worship and divine fellowship on the one hand, there is public testimony on the other; it covers the whole position. Towards God worship, among ourselves fellowship, and towards man testimony.

What is in the Bible is to be in the saints; there is no living witness until it is in the saints. Moses wrote the law in a book as a witness against the children of Israel, as we read in Deuteronomy 31. That is the solemn thing today; the Bible is a divine witness against God's people, because what is written in the book is not written in them. What a terrible thing that the book of God should become a solemn, divine witness against the people of God! God's thought was not that, but that His people should be a legible copy of what was written in the book — that is the copy that men take account of. Men do not care much for the Bible, but they would be greatly affected if they saw the Bible livingly in the people of God; that would move them, and they would begin to think that there was something in it after all.

Then there was the reading of the law, which is very important. "All Israel and their elders, and their officers and judges, stood on this side and on that side of the ark before the priests the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, as well the stranger as the home-born Israelite; half of them toward Mount Gerizim, and the other half of them toward Mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of Jehovah had commanded, that they should bless the people of Israel, in the beginning. And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua read not before the whole congregation of Israel, and the women, and the children, and the strangers that lived among them". We have a company now, the whole assembly, including the women and children, viewed as in such a state that every word that had been written could be read in their hearing. They were in correspondence with the blessing and in correspondence with the curses. It says that there was not a word that Joshua did not read. I fancy there are a great many words that we do not read. There are things we pass over because we are not prepared for them; we are not prepared to listen to that particular word. Responsibility is connected with hearing — "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear", Matthew 11: 15. When we hear we come under responsibility and it is solemn.

Writing in Scripture is connected with what God does in the souls of His people. He says, "I will put my law in their hearts, and in their minds will I write them". Paul says to the Corinthians, "Ye are manifested to be Christ's epistle ministered by us, written, not with ink, but the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tables, but on fleshy tables of the heart". The writing is what God does, but the reading is connected with our responsibility. If God speaks I am responsible to hear, and God expects His people, when they hear, to say Amen.

JOSHUA 9

Joshua 9

We see here in the coming of the Gibeonites a picture of how the enemy would work, not now in the way of unfaithfulness among the people of God as in Achan, but as introducing foreign elements and getting them accepted.

The responsibility rested on the princes; they answer to those who lead among the people of God in our day. They might have thought according to Deuteronomy 20 that they were right to make peace with those at a distance, but we have to distinguish between things that differ. Evangelical principles, if not kept in their right place, might be destructive of assembly principles. It shows the importance of enquiring of the Lord when people want to come into fellowship; otherwise there may be a very fair show of being right, but in receiving persons principles may be received that are not of God. The New Testament speaks of those who had come in surreptitiously to spy out their liberty; there were those who had got in under false pretences. Jude speaks of those who had crept in unawares; they got in slyly and unobserved. That kind of thing seems to be illustrated here, the subtle ways of the enemy to get foreign elements introduced among the people of God. The Gibeonites were Hivites, and they never ceased to be Hivites; they never became Israelites, so that their presence as being in league or covenant with Israel must always have been a lowering of the true character of Israel.

The Gibeonites were persons who had not come under spiritual motives. Such persons see that there is a certain selfish advantage to be derived from being in league with the people of God. That is how Satan works; he presents a certain advantage to be gained by walking with the people of God, some benefit to be derived that is not of a spiritual character. The Gibeonites used the name of Jehovah: "We have come because of the name of Jehovah". They say, "We are your servants". They present themselves in a nice way, and it is these nice people that we have to beware of, not the people who come gnashing their teeth.

It is a striking thing that they took of their victuals; it is a very serious matter to take victuals from people until you know where they come from. If you take victuals from them you have given yourself away. They were deceived; there was all the appearance of what was right; the Gibeonites' shoes and clothes were ragged, their bottles were rent, and their bread mouldy; it seemed to show that they had come a long way. All that they had appeared to be old. In a general way in christendom Satan works by what is old; people are impressed by what bears the mark of antiquity. It all seemed very pious; they

seemed to be honouring the Lord. We are often deceived by pious talk. I know how easy it is, for I have been deceived myself by pious talk and a pious demeanour, and have not seen that underneath that talk and appearance there are principles that are altogether foreign to the Israel of God. We have to consider what the true character of the Israel of God is. The danger is that the Hivites come in the guise, not of a foe but of a friend, and say, Make a league with us. They come without a sword and a spear; if they had come with them the Israelites would have known what to do. That is the way that unspiritual elements have come in among the people of God. It is much easier to let them in than to get rid of them. Israel never got rid of the Gibeonites and it was not God's way that they should; but it was a constant reproach in Israel that there should be service connected with the house of God and with the altar that was of a servile nature, and not the service of sons. If the Gibeonites are connected with the house it is only to serve as bondmen and not as sons. Every time an Israelite had his wood chopped by a Gibeonite, and every barrow full of wood he saw carried into the temple by a Gibeonite, must have reminded him of that element which came in through their not seeking counsel of the mouth of Jehovah.

We read later (2 Samuel 21) that "in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah" Saul slew the Gibeonites. Saul was an impatient man, and he applied a human remedy to an acknowledged defeat. He said, These Hivites were not of Israel, and in his impatience and zeal he would have destroyed them. But he dishonoured the Lord as much and more than Joshua and the princes did by letting them in. Mistakes may be made by the people of God, and it is not God's way that they should be removed. In a general way His people have to abide by the results, and have to act in such a way as is suitable to God. We may make mistakes, but it is no use to say, I have made a mistake and I will undo it. No, God says that if we make a mistake we have to abide by it; we have to submit and learn to behave in a way that is suitable to His name. Israel had to learn what was suitable to the name of the Lord; it was not a question of what was suitable to Israel or how to deal with the Gibeonites, but what was suitable to the name of the Lord.

The princes did not enquire at the mouth of Jehovah. It is a searching thing that we do things without enquiring at the mouth of Jehovah and then find out that we have made a mistake, and it is no wonder. The government of God came in because of the mistake, and they had to suffer the presence of this people for evermore. It is not always God's way to correct mistakes in the church. The effects remain and have to be worked out to a final issue — that makes it so solemn if we make a mistake, especially an assembly mistake. Perhaps people think it is a very nice thing to have a few more in fellowship.

The Gibeonites came and presented themselves as allies, and perhaps the princes thought it a nice thing to have a few more to give a helping hand with the enemies, so they took them in.

I should be afraid to suggest to anyone that they should take a path of separation if they were not up to it. If people take that path without being prepared for it they will only do it in a servile spirit, and then after thirty years go out and say, Now I have found liberty — that is a Gibeonite. It is a serious thing to serve in a spirit that is under God's curse, a servile spirit. Joshua said, "Now therefore ye are cursed" — and they remained as a cursed, servile people who never ministered to the pleasure of God; they were tributaries but not contributory. These things are written as warnings for us — if I read this chapter it should raise an exercise, Am I a Gibeonite? Have I a place among the people of God more or less under false pretences? The Lord can make anything tributary; the very presence of unspiritual elements in the assembly can be made tributary, but not contributory. All the elements of weakness and failure which Satan has introduced are tributary because God uses these things to exercise His people, therefore He overrules it and turns it to good account, but that does not make it pleasurable to Him. The Gibeonites' service was never pleasurable to Him; He says, "Let my son go, that he may serve me" — the Gibeonites were never sons, they were servile to the end. Someone was talking to me today about the absence of spring among Christians; there is not the spring there should be in the service and praise of God, hearts breaking forth happily and freely; we get on to the line of what is servile. Hewing wood and drawing water was always for others. It is possible to be in fellowship for many years without having much real touch with divine things.

The princes recognised that nothing but a servile character of things could be taken up by such a people; and, though they had been wrong in swearing to them, they had to stand by their oath because Jehovah's name had become connected with it. If people are received among us, it does not alter the obligation. We see that we behave towards them according to Jehovah's name. What is due and worthy of that name is always to govern us.

JOSHUA 10

Joshua 10

This chapter is very interesting, because though the place the Gibeonites had taken in connection with Israel was taken deceitfully and through want of exercise and enquiry of God on the part of His people, yet God overrules it in order to bring all the force of the enemy into evidence so that they might be completely destroyed. It shows the wonderful way that God can overrule the introduction of unspiritual elements among His people in order to bring out the power of what is heavenly. The Gibeonites had no power; they were not able to defend themselves. They were among the people of God without liberty or power of sonship. They were like Lot, who had no power when the adversary came. He fell captive, and, if there had not been a spiritual man not far off with plenty of trained servants, he would have remained in captivity.

We have three lessons in these earlier chapters of Joshua which are most important in view of the conflict. First, the power of the ark at Jericho, the power of Christ as the ark of the covenant. Second, at Ai we have in type the work of God in the souls of His people which always answers to the javelin of Joshua; the work of God in His people always answers to any standard the Spirit raises at any particular moment. The third lesson is at Beth-horon in chapter 10, where we see the direct intervention of heaven. These are three great elements of spiritual victory.

The hailstones, and sun and moon standing still, look on to the future when God will actually crush the power of the enemy. Every spiritual power of wickedness will be annihilated by the direct intervention of heaven; and the saints are in the light of that now. It is striking that we see here the direct action of heaven, which we have not had before in the book. The hailstones make one think of the time when the angel will pour out the seventh bowl in Revelation, and the hailstones will come down weighing a hundredweight each. Who can stand against that? It is the power that operates from heaven and will bring everything down; every enemy will be laid low. The sun and moon will stand still. The hailstones speak of destructive power, but the sun and moon standing still, or literally *being silent*, speak of the wonderful place in which Christ is at present as the glorified One. He is standing still in the heavens, and is going to stand still there until every spiritual power which is hostile to God and His people is laid low. The sun and moon are both seen above the horizon at the same time. The moon is the church seen in conjunction with a glorified Christ, answering to Him and reflecting Him. If we

had a sense in our souls of the present place of Christ as the sun in the heavens, it would deliver us from every suggestion of spiritual wickedness.

The hailstones represent the providential intervention of God in support of the truth. This is rather in contrast to the heavenly influence of the sun. The hailstones are forcible things, especially when they weigh a hundredweight. The influence of the sun is genial; it acts on the principle of attraction. Light and warmth and life-giving influence flow from the sun. If there is conflict, light comes from the Head. The sun is a glorious figure of the headship of Christ, rather than of His lordship. Just as the sun holds the whole solar system together by the power of attraction, so Christ as Head holds everything together by the power of attraction, and He gives light to His people for conflict. There is a spiritual light shining in Christ as the sun in the heavens, so that the saints may be able to pursue the conflict until every enemy is killed. Then there is also the providential side. At the Reformation there was a shining of the light of the sun, and precious truth was given from Christ as Head: justification by faith, and the authority of the Scriptures. Then there were hailstones: the world powers, the king of England and others, rose up and threw off the yoke of Rome — that was like the hailstones, providential happenings coming in to break the powers of evil.

We see Christ as the sun in the heavens at the end of Ephesians 1. The apostle is praying, and at the close of his prayer he stops when he thinks of the greatness of Christ: "the exceeding greatness of his power which he wrought in Christ in raising him from among the dead". He stops praying and starts teaching: "and he set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come, and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all". That is the sun standing still in the heavens. The Son of God has been standing still in the midst of the heavens for nearly two thousand years. We are in the greatest day possible; it would be better to live one day now than a hundred years in the time of Methuselah.

The sun remained standing about a full day, and there was no day like it before or since. That is the spiritual and heavenly character of the present day. There is a glorified Christ in the heavens, and there is a company down here answering to it like the moon; and in the light of that there is power to overthrow every evil element that can possibly arise. Under the leading of the Spirit we can keep the sun and the moon in evidence as long as the day of conflict continues, until there is not another Amorite. I believe the whole

incident is a rebuke from Jehovah, for I think the motive of the princes must have been that they wanted allies, and God rebukes them by showing that all the power of the heavens is with them and for them. What were a few Gibeonites who, after all, could not stand up for themselves, much less for Israel!

In Acts 16 Paul rebuked the girl with the spirit of Python; he would not have a Gibeonitish ally; and we find something that very much answers to the power from heaven in the earthquake. It seems to suggest that the saints in their conflict with spiritual wickedness are in the full light of the day, the light of a glorified Christ sitting at the right hand of God until His foes are made His footstool — that is the light of the day and the church is seen corresponding with Him and answering to Him.

The completeness of the victory is seen in verses 22 - 27 when Joshua calls on the men of Israel to put their feet on the necks of the five kings. That answers to the last chapter of Romans: "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". There will be complete victory over all the power of evil, and the saints are called to have part in it.

JOSHUA 11 AND 12

Joshua 11; Joshua 12

We have noticed before that three parts of the conflict recorded in this book are brought before us in detail; that is, Jericho, Ai and Gibeon. All the rest of the conflict is not dwelt on in detail; it is simply recorded that Joshua and all Israel with him moved from one city to another in a course of victory, until it can be said at the end of chapter 11 that the land rested from war. There were details still to be dealt with, but practically the conflict is over. The different victories now recorded have the character of overcoming which is to mark the saints; they are to be marked by overcoming and victorious power. Many times it is said, "Joshua and all Israel" — the whole company moves together. At Ai they moved sectionally and there was disaster, but after that they moved altogether.

The character of overcoming that belongs to the assembly is typified here; we do not see individual overcoming. In Ephesians the conflict is assembly conflict, but in Revelation we have ruin and departure and the overcoming becomes individual. But we are in the light of Ephesians, and every part of the truth is vital in the estimation of all the saints; that is, it is so normally. If there is conflict in regard of dispossessing the enemy and breaking his power, it is a matter of personal interest to every saint on earth. Certain things are normal to the whole assembly and each one of us has to come to them individually; but these things belong to the assembly, not to any individual.

This answers to the thought of overcoming in John's writings; it would help us if we took account of these chapters in that light. I believe that overcoming in John's writings is distinctly the warfare of the land, not wilderness warfare. We have the latter in Romans and Galatians, but in John it is warfare in the land, both in the gospel and in the epistle. In the gospel of John the Lord Himself is the great Overcomer. We begin by looking at the ark of Jehovah; we see the will of God brought in in a divine Person in manhood. We see the Son of God come in flesh; He is the great Overcomer and nothing can stand before Him. "I have overcome the world" — that is almost His last word. He is the great Overcomer, and it is in keeping Him before us that we get power. I never get power by thinking of the man who cannot overcome, and I may get despondent over it; I shall never get power that way, but weakness. Power comes in considering the One who says, "I have overcome". In John's gospel we see the ark of Jehovah, not exactly the ark of the covenant that secures all for man — that is Luke, but it is the ark of Jehovah, God's will absolutely secured in a Man, His own beloved Son, and nothing can touch that.

In John's gospel we find not only the ark of Jehovah, One who can say, "The ruler of this world comes and has nothing in me", but He does not leave this world until He has secured a generation that is no more of the world than He is. That is the great truth of John's gospel. The ark of Jehovah is the Son of God. The man in John 9 is a typical overcomer; he goes step by step in the path of light until he comes into the full light of the Son of God. In John we have the religious world, not the profane world.

In believing that Jesus is the Son of God we should get light as to all that the world is. In John's gospel everything is really the opposite to what it appears. It appeared as if the Son of God was judged when He was condemned to death, but really the world was judged on the part of the Son of God. The public judgment of the cross was that He was a criminal, a malefactor not fit to live; but, looking at it rightly, the world is judged — "Now is the judgment of this world". The whole system of this world that rejected Him is judged. What kind of a world could it be that could not tolerate the Son of God! The rulers and princes of this world cast Him out publicly — it was the Son of God they cast out! What did Peter, John and all the rest think of the religious world in the light of the faith of the Son of God? What did they think of the gorgeous ritual of the temple? It all fell to the ground with a crash. It had rejected the Son of God — what was it after that to them? The world to them was a judged thing — not the world of newspapers, theatres, and novels, but the religious world, the Jewish world where the Lord was during all His life, the professed people of God — that is what we have to overcome today. It is that which is more hateful to God than the lusts of men. The lusts of men are bad enough, but the religious pride of man is more hateful to God. Babylon indicates that. Look at the woman in John 8 — there was more room in her for the light of God than there was in the Pharisees; there was no room in their hearts for the light of God. It is a solemn thing for us to face the fact that we have to judge every element in the world, and particularly the elements that take a religious form. The world had a religious form when the Lord was here, it was full of elements that came from beneath. The Lord says in John 8, "Ye are of the things beneath, I am of the things above". Satan holds men more by religious influences than anything else.

We have to estimate things according to the demonstration of the Spirit. Those begotten of God are able to receive the Spirit's demonstration about the world in every aspect. There were thirty-one kings mentioned here, which shows how many different forms the power of evil may take; but we can judge it all by the demonstration of the spirit. The Spirit brings demonstration to the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. The demonstration is effective in the affections of the saints. The saints say, Everything here is marked by sin,

because they do not believe on the Son of God. There is no righteousness in the world system because it has rejected Him, and He has gone to the Father. The conviction is in the souls of the saints, not in the unconverted man.

"When he is come, he shall bring demonstration". He brings demonstration that everything of the religious world system is marked by sin and the absence of righteousness. All is under the rule of Satan, but Satan's rule will be fully exposed and judged.

The man in John 9 was cast out because they could not fit him in; there was no place in the synagogue for a man like that, and if people confess the Son of God according to their measure of light they will find that they are cast out; they will not be put to the trouble of going out. The Lord was putting forth His own sheep. The two words are the same; "they *cast him out*" is the same word as the Lord uses when He *puts forth* His own sheep. The man who was cast out was the man whom the Lord put forth as one of His sheep. If we have faith in the Son of God, if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and move on the line of being begotten of God, we shall be preserved from every one of the thirty-one kings. There is not one of them that we shall want to spare; they have all to be slain. The world takes many forms; John in his epistle says that there are many antichrists. He does not speak about the personal antichrist, but he wants us to think of the many; they have all to be overcome.

There is a great power residing in the saints, so we find that whatever Jehovah said to Moses and Moses said to Joshua comes to pass; there is not a single foe left in these chapters that can stand up against Joshua and all Israel with him. There is a unity about it that baffles Satan. The Lord's last word to the church viewed in responsibility is to remind the church that He is the great Overcomer. It is the only reference to what He was personally that we have in any of His addresses to the seven churches: His last word is, "Even as I also overcame and am set down with my father in his throne". He is the great Overcomer.

There is a moment reached when the fighting is over and Joshua and Eleazar could proceed to allot the inheritance. Fighting is dealing with the opposing powers, but these powers are dealt with in view of the inheritance being enjoyed. We find, as a matter of fact, that every enemy was not destroyed; even giants are left, and Philistines and Sidonians and Jebusites and other people. That is how it is practically; the enemies are not all destroyed, so there is still some fighting left for us to do. People have an idea that we are to stand still and see everything done for us. That is true if you are at the Red Sea; but in the land you are not to stand still and see everything done for you;

you have to buckle on your armour and fight. I remember a brother once went to a place where an evangelist had been labouring for some months, and he said to the people, 'Mr. — has been telling you how easy it is to be saved, but I am come to tell you how hard it is to be saved!' Both things are true.

The Lord provides rest; it is not all fighting. When we come together on Lord's day morning we do not come to fight; the Lord is pleased to give His people a resting-place. The ark went three days journey to seek out a resting-place. The Lord delights to seek out a resting-place for His people. It is not all conflict; the inheritance is enjoyed.

JOSHUA 13 AND 14

Joshua 13; Joshua 14

In the beginning of chapter 13 Jehovah says to Joshua, "Thou art old, advanced in days, and there remaineth yet very much land to take possession of". This seems to indicate the weakening of spiritual lead amongst the people of God. We find the contrast in Caleb in chapter 14, and this is very encouraging for us, because, if we have to feel deeply that we have no longer the leading of apostolic power, yet we can see in Caleb a spirit that goes through to the end. I think what is said of Joshua suggests the passing of the energy of spiritual leading found in the apostles. We can see that every power of darkness fell before the apostles; there was then a spiritual power for leading in the Spirit of Christ that nothing could stand against, but it was not God's way to continue it in the assembly. My impression is that Caleb represents a spirit that would go right through to the end. Paul and Timothy very much illustrate it. Paul was in prison and ready to depart old and advanced in days. That powerful spiritual leading was about to be removed, but Paul's great exercise was that Timothy should be a true Caleb. It seems to me an implied contrast between the failing strength of Joshua which is clearly suggested, and the undiminished strength of Caleb which was as strong for war as it was forty-five years before. There is an undiminished, undecayed energy in Caleb. It is the Caleb element that we want for the inheritance.

We find afterwards that the people served Jehovah as long as Joshua lived, and as long as the elders that knew him lived. It suggests that there was a preservative power in the assembly in the persons of the apostles, and that power passed away. It left an impression on those conversant with the apostles, but it has passed away and we shall never have it again. There will never be that spiritual energy in the church that there was in the apostles, though we have their ministry in the Scriptures, but it is interesting to see that what does not pass away is the Caleb spirit. Joshua does not fight any more after chapter 11. Now it is a question of taking possession; the power of the enemy has been broken. In a sense we can say it has been broken by the power of the Spirit in the apostles.

Now in the presence of Joshua being old and passing away God calls attention to the dividing of the land by lot. He calls attention to His own determinate purpose, His own purpose in grace, given to the saints in Christ Jesus — that answers to the land being divided by lot. He says to Joshua, "Thou art old and advanced in days and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed of". Then there is a statement of various parts of the land and then God says, "I

will dispossess them before the children of Israel. Only partition it by lot to the children of Israel for an inheritance as I have commanded thee", verse 6. This shows that what was in the purpose of God for His people comes into prominence at a time when spiritual leadership may be enfeebled so that when Paul writes 2 Timothy he most emphatically calls attention to the purpose of God in Christ Jesus. If Paul was going, the purpose of God was not to be changed, or diminished or defeated; it was to be carried through. Jehovah says here to Joshua, You are going, but I will secure the inheritance for my people. The point in 2 Timothy is that everything is secured on the line of divine purpose. That was brought in to encourage Timothy, who was a comparatively feeble vessel. We see a vessel of extraordinary energy in Paul, but in Timothy a man of tears who needs to be encouraged and exhorted not to be ashamed, exhorted to rekindle the gift that was in him. It seems to suggest that his faith was burning low because of all the conditions around him. Paul encourages and strengthens him, and tells him to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; that goes back to God's purpose.

Proverbs 16 tells us, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole decision is of Jehovah". If it is a question of lot, Jehovah decides; that is firmly established in chapter 13, and in chapters 14 and 15 God works out His purpose through moral conditions. In Caleb and Achsah his daughter we see moral conditions which are necessary in order that God may effectuate His purposes. God could not consistently with Himself effectuate His purpose except in moral conditions which are suitable.

Think of these two old men standing up before all Israel and talking to one another like this! The principle of the inheritance was secured in Caleb, and Joshua was a chosen warrior. We see the wonderful way in which Jehovah had captured and kept Caleb's affections. Joshua is a type of spiritual power and the element of spiritual leading among the saints. A true Caleb would not make the heart of the people melt; he wholly followed Jehovah his God — that is what we need now. It is so easy to be disheartening one another; it is easy to see difficulties and to create them when we do not see them. Some are on the line of creating difficulties and disheartening the saints in the path of faith. One would not care to be on that line; Caleb said, I have wholly followed Jehovah my God: he definitely had Jehovah before him in his affections, and he was moving after him with his whole heart. It did not matter to Caleb how many spies brought false reports; it was "a very, very good land" to Caleb, and Caleb had established his title. The inheritance was in Caleb before Caleb was in the inheritance. The other men could tell out what they saw with their eyes, but Caleb says, I told them as it was in my heart. That makes all the difference; we expose ourselves. The light was in Caleb; it is a great thing to

have things in us. If there is nothing in us we shall fail and discourage others; if there is something divinely wrought in us, that stands. It is said of Satan that "he abode not in the truth", he must have been there in a sense, but there was no truth in him. One may be in the truth positionally and not have the truth in us; being in the truth is that it surrounds us, but having the truth in us is another matter. Caleb brought word as it was in his heart; the land was in Caleb's heart according to the love that had given it. He had Jehovah before him, and Jehovah had given the land in love to His people; therefore it must be a very, very good land. Caleb sees no difficulties; he sees everything to attract and nothing to dismay.

The Lord could say, "Thy law is within my heart", and He presents Himself to us in Psalm 16 as the One who stood in the inheritance: "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage". "Jehovah is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup; thou maintainest my lot". He stood, and was the only One who did ever stand, in the full scope of the inheritance, and all that it was in the purpose of God's heart to give to man.

I suppose that Judah takes the lead in precedence to Joseph because of the character of Caleb. Caleb was the prince of Judah, and his character was such that he secured for Judah pre-eminence in the allotment of the inheritance. Ephraim and Manasseh should have been first; theirs was the birthright, but Judah comes in first under cover of the prince, Caleb. It shows how one man of faith can secure prominence in the inheritance to his tribe; it is not only his own benefit, but his whole tribe benefits — Caleb was the prince of Judah.

It is profoundly interesting to me that Hebron was the first city to be inherited; it gives us the great element of the inheritance to be secured. Hebron means *Company* and it suggests the enjoyment together in family conditions of what is given to us of God. It suggests the fellowship viewed from John's point of view. Kirjath-arba is the city of Arba and we are told he was a great man among the Anakim. It is the great men who have been the hindrance to fellowship in christendom. Hebron is connected with God's original thought to set His people together in companionship — that is the great thought of God, and it is what Satan has resisted from the outset. He has always been seeking to bring in elements that would oppose the companionship, the family fellowship of the people of God.

In Anak's three sons (see chapter 15: 14) we see principles that Satan sets up to hinder; and we have to take up in spiritual power the setting aside of man after the flesh. If that man goes, the three sons of Anak go; their execution is secured. I think their names are very suggestive. Sheshai means *free*; he represents the principle of free thought. Ahiman means *brother of man*; it is a

human brotherhood on the basis of free thought. Talmai means *bold* or *spirited*; that is in contrast to the spirit of subjection that marks the people of God. Satan opposes the principle of the companionship of God's people by bringing in this principle of human brotherhood on the basis of free thought. Your thoughts are not to be cramped or held by the Bible; you must be free, and you must consider for man, be a brother of men. We hear of all such talks of brotherhood today, but they are all of human kind and are marked by insubjection to God — man asserting his rights in a bold and spirited way and boasting of lawlessness. These are sons of Anak, and have to be displaced; the spirit of these things has to be displaced in our hearts if Kirjath-arba is to become Hebron.

Joshua blessing Caleb (verse 13) answers to what has been said of Paul blessing Timothy. Paul passes the inheritance, so to speak, into the hands of Timothy, and leaves him to maintain it. Joshua had been conversant for many years with Caleb and could discern what was suitable about him. He was not one who shrank from difficulties; he asked for a place where there were the greatest difficulties. Do we covet difficulties? Caleb did, and asked for the most difficult place there was.

I think we are too general in our thoughts of the inheritance. We can look at it in a general way as outlined in Numbers 34, but we do not take possession in a general way. When it comes to possession, the inheritance is divided by lot; there is a specific portion for each tribe. That is a very important exercise for us, and, in connection with that, no doubt we have all noticed that the land on the east side of Jordan is never said to be divided by lot.

Division by lot is connected with the sovereignty of divine purpose in Christ Jesus. "In Christ Jesus" is a characteristic of 2 Timothy. It comes in in different connections; it is connected with the sovereignty of God in relation to His anointed Man, the risen and glorified Man; all is secured in Him. This distinctive portion is given to each tribe, but the great exercise is that we should possess it. We are too general; we think of the purposes of God in Christ Jesus in its general aspect as being the portion of all saints, but that is too big for me. The blessing of God in Christ Jesus *is* for all saints, and all are there, but have I found out what part of "in Christ Jesus" is my portion? I have something distinctive, and the saints in any locality have something distinctive. I am put in companionship locally with the children of God — that is the local company. But Hebron is only one city in Judah. There are a great many cities in Judah, and they are all grouped together as the inheritance of one tribe. There must be something to answer to it spiritually; it is part of the inspired word of God and I must take heed to it, and think how the inheritance is taken

up. It is taken up collectively. Divine light comes to us at the present time and would result in our moving on the line of 2 Timothy, because that is the only way in which we can reach divine companionship with the saints. If we try to reach companionship on any other principle, it means the sacrifice of everything that is for God.

Chapter 15 refers to the inheritance of the tribes "according to their families". Spiritual salvation depends on our taking up in family affections our links with the people of God, not only locally, in the sense of each local assembly, but in a tribal way. In the Songs of Degrees reference is made to the tribes going up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where Jehovah sets His name, and every tribe must come there. Jerusalem represents the universal bond of the people of God; everything was centralised at Jerusalem, and everything is centralised in the Spirit. When we come together locally to break bread there might be things connected with us locally that have to be mentioned; we mention any one commended to us for fellowship, and any local interests of the Lord which stands in relation to His rights in the assembly. But when we have taken the Supper, if the Lord is pleased to manifest Himself to us, He leads us out of what is local, He takes us to Jerusalem; He leads us to what is universal and outside time altogether. That is why we do not care to connect the notices with the latter part of the meeting, because the notices are local. The spiritual worship of the saints is universal and outside time conditions: we sometimes sing, "Eternity's begun". If we reach the presence of the Lord, that is not local; that belongs to universal, spiritual privilege. If I am speaking to the Father or to God in a priestly way, we are outside what is local; it is universal. I mention this because there is a spiritual reason for things being done in God's assembly, and we ought to be exercised, not only to fall in with what is done, but to know why it is done. If we touch the spiritual region we are outside what is local. Brothers and sisters come together as brothers and sisters; that is the outward order of the assembly; we never leave it, we are always brothers and sisters, and sisters must be silent. That is the outward local order, but in the spiritual sphere there are no brothers or sisters, we are all in the same blessed relationship, and the inheritance is outside time. We are not in the inheritance outwardly, it depends on what we are spiritually.

I have my own spiritual constitution like Caleb; that is what I am personally. Then there is what I am locally, what I am in my own meeting, and there is what I am in my own tribe as united with all the people of God within reach. But when we go up to Jerusalem we leave all that and go up to spiritual privilege. We approach the Father in His own circle and circumstances, and we are outside what is personal, what is local; we are in the universal

companionship of the whole assembly. That is the universal privilege of the assembly, outside time or locality.

The Lord's presence with His own does not depend on faith alone. It is "If ye love me" — it is all conditional on that. The Lord says, "And I will pray the Father", and then He says, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you". It is all a question of "If ye love me". He comes to lovers, not to believers only.

We announce the Lord's death "*till he come*". That has a local bearing; it is the public witness. The Lord's supper has many sides; that is one side, the public witness in the place where He died. We have a few feeble individuals or a greater company who come together to break bread and drink the cup; and it is God's solemn, public memorial of the death of His blessed Son. It is the most solemn thing in relation to the world; there is nothing so solemn as the saints eating the Supper; it is God's solemn witness to His murdered Son. If we were true to what the supper is locally, it would be an open door by which we should pass to a spiritual region outside time and locality, where we could truly say, "Eternity's begun".

JOSHUA 15

Joshua 15

These incidents which are dealt on in detail are no doubt of very great importance as giving us the principles and the power in which the inheritance can be possessed and enjoyed. We have considered Caleb in chapter 14, and have seen in him, not simply faith, but the energy of love in which he wholly followed Jehovah. It is love that can truly take account of the purposes and pleasure of God in regard to the inheritance. Caleb's heart was commanded by Jehovah, so, if Jehovah had purposed to give the land, it was to Caleb a very good land. His affections were centred in Jehovah; he really had the spirit of sonship. He said, "If Jehovah delight in us, he will give us the land"; that is, he looked at it from the standpoint of Jehovah's delight in His people. I think that it is only love that can enter into God's delight in blessing His people. Caleb wholly followed Jehovah; whatever was before Jehovah was before Caleb. Timothy, in the New Testament, corresponds with Caleb as one who fully followed up what Paul had set forth in regard to the purpose of God, the delight of God in His purposes of love; he was one who wholly followed. That is the kind of person who can possess the inheritance, and who can set aside "the great man" as Caleb did. "Now the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-Arba; the great man among the Anakim". It is a great thing to dispossess the great man. Caleb dispossessed the great man and his three sons, and what has been the city of the great man becomes Hebron, which means company, the place where the companionship of the children of God can be enjoyed. It is the first city to be really possessed in the land; we read of victories over cities before, but the first city to become an inheritance is Hebron. It seems to indicate that fellowship with one another which John speaks of. I do not think that there is any fellowship, any divine companionship as long as the great man has a place. It is not only the great man but his mind that has to go. It is wonderful what is connected with Hebron; it becomes a city of refuge and a special portion of the children of Aaron, the chief priestly city in Israel.

Now I think we see in Achsah the product of the energy of love in Caleb. He had a daughter and she was marked by earnestness as to springs of water. This comes in consequent upon the introduction of Othniel, and the taking of Kirjath-sepher, which means *The city of the book*. In connection with the second city to be possessed, it is a question of the mind of man as stored up in books; it covers the whole literature of the world. It is possible to see that the man after the flesh, however great he is, is of no account with God and must be judged (that is, Kirjath-Arba), and yet there may be a respect for the products of his mind, that man can write interesting books. What sort of books

were written in Canaan? They may have had many interesting books, but we may be quite sure there was not a single book in Kirjath-sepher that was honouring to Jehovah or a help to His people. We do not need the books that can be found in Kirjath-sepher. Christianity has been used to decorate the wrong man, even the name of Christ has been brought in and used to decorate and beautify the wrong man, so that the world is beautified and adorned by it. The finest buildings in the world are Christian buildings;

the world is adorned by them; it is the wrong system and the wrong man adorned. You cannot connect Christ with this world at all. He is disallowed and cast out as worthless; that is the real judgment of Christ by the world. The stone is rejected by the builders.

It is very interesting to see that Othniel comes to light as being able to take that city. It suggests a continuation of things which would correspond with Paul's words to Timothy. Paul has in mind the continuation of things; he passes things on to Timothy, and tells him to pass them on to faithful men, able to teach others also. We see things passing on, the conflict passing on to other hands; it passes on to the hands of Othniel and he is marked by his power to capture the city of the book. I think the man who can completely overthrow in his spirit the influence of the literature of the world can be trusted with Caleb's daughter. Caleb's daughter represents, not the energy that can get victory, but the state of soul that is intensely interested in springs of water. She represents the subjective state which is the product of spiritual energy. If there is the energy of love, the spiritual state seen in Achsah will result.

The world's literature has increasingly a spiritual character in an evil scene. The books most highly esteemed in the world and which appear to be educational have a vein of positive infidelity running through them all. You cannot take up a popular encyclopaedia that has not a spiritual element in it of infidelity and the setting aside of the holy Scriptures as being inspired of God. There is a terrible working of the power of evil in the literature of the world, and it is becoming increasingly so today. We could not expect to find springs of water where people are reading habitually the literature of the world. A great deal of spiritual vitality is sapped by the kind of reading that Christians indulge in habitually. The springs of water come in when Kirjath-Sepher is taken and the name changed. In Acts 19 we read they had a fine bonfire and burnt the worth in books of fifty thousand pieces of silver. When I was converted I had a bonfire and I never regretted it. It is much better to burn such books than to take them to the bookstall to poison someone else.

If we give ourselves to books which contain a description of the land we shall find quite as much entertainment as we need. We are not without books, but not books written by Canaanitish hands. We have princes in Israel who have written books;

it is a fine thing to read books written by princes in Israel. Then we shall find that there are springs of water.

It is interesting to see that the city of the book becomes characterised by a divine speaking. Debir means *Speaker*, so we have something which is far superior to anything that is the product of man's mind; we have the mind of God spoken forth for the instruction of His people. What a happy exchange that is! When that gets place with us, we can begin to understand the southern land and, the more we see what a southern land we have, the more exercised we shall be about the springs of water. Achsah had a southern land, everything was most favourable, but then it required springs of water. We all understand that we have a southern land; God has acted in a most favourable way towards us. He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ". All is most favourable, but the more we enter into the favourableness of it, the more we shall feel the need of springs of water. In a natural sense, the sunnier the land is, the more need there is for springs of water; it dries up more quickly. Achsah was exercised about springs. It is a great exercise for us that we should not be content with the knowledge of the great favour of God to us objectively, but that we should have an intense desire for springs of water.

Briefly and simply I should say that the upper springs refer to what we have in God the Father and in His Son Jesus Christ; and the lower springs refer to the comfort and refreshment which we find in the brethren. In Ephesians we have a wonderful presentation to us of God the Father, and in Colossians we have a wonderful presentation of Christ. Now the refreshment of that, the spiritual power of it in the souls of the saints, I take to be what answers to the upper springs. But then there are the lower springs; there is great comfort and refreshment to be found in the company of the brethren. John speaks about the Father and the Son, but he also speaks about the brethren. The springs speak of real refreshment, not things held merely as a doctrine. One might be perfectly sound on the New Testament doctrine of the Spirit and be dry for want of springs.

Achsah went to Caleb, to her father, here a type of God. We only get springs through prayer; knowing the doctrine of things will not give it to us. I have given addresses on the Spirit and His activities, and have gone home to say, "Give me springs of water". The springs are the activities, the flowings; it is

not simply that one has the Spirit. Every saint in Christ has the Spirit, but it is another thing to have the springs, the activity of spiritual affections in the power of the Spirit. That is found in divine Persons first — the upper springs; and then in the brethren, something living and fresh. We can only enjoy the inheritance as there are springs of water.

JOSHUA 16 TO 19

Joshua 16; Joshua 17; Joshua 18; Joshua 19

I believe that there is a very general desire among the people of God to enjoy that which God in love has made their portion. I trust we are all animated by the desire to honour God, by the appreciation and enjoyment of that which His love has given us at the present time. It is that which makes this book of Joshua, particularly the part which is now before us, so intensely interesting and attractive.

The Lord has been faithful in giving ministry, but the practical possession and enjoyment of the things spoken of and ministered is of the greatest importance. We have to learn how to take up the inheritance. We have a most wonderful inheritance; that which was given to Israel was but a figure of it. Paul tells the Colossians that the Father has made us competent to share the portion of the saints in light — that is the inheritance. Many of us are content with the title; we are ready to say, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. That is very blessed, but what about the present practical enjoyment of it? The present position is that many of the people of God have not taken up their inheritance; therefore it is a practical question for us how we are to take it up.

These chapters deal with the division of the inheritance by lot among the tribes of Israel. As we see in chapter 13, the portion of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh had been given to them by Moses on the east side of Jordan. In chapters 15 - 17 the portions of the tribes of Judah and Joseph, that is, Ephraim and the other half of Manasseh, were specifically assigned to them, God indicating at the outset that they were to have their portions as He indicated, answering to God's direct disposition in the apostles in the early chapters of the Acts. In chapters 18 and 19 the position is different, for in chapter 18 the tent of meeting was set up in Shiloh, and the distribution of the territory of the seven remaining tribes was made there by "Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun and the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel ... at the entrance of the tent of meeting", chapter 19:51. It is not apostolic authority, as seen in Moses or Joshua, but the priestly element is recognised, and all the saints are brought into the matter at the entrance of the tent of meeting. The place that the priestly element has in all assembly matters is of the first importance, because after apostolic judgment ends we must depend on the priestly element. This section of the book therefore applies to the saints right through the dispensation, and governs us in our present mode of sharing the inheritance.

We have been considering that, in this book, Joshua represents, not exactly Christ personally, but the leading of Christ by the Spirit such as we see in the apostles. Now that leading would always be in the direction of our taking up the inheritance. The tent of meeting as seen in the land stands in definite relation to the inheritance, which it did not in the wilderness. In the wilderness it was the tabernacle of the testimony, but in the land it was seen, not in connection with the testimony, but with the enjoyment of the inheritance. In the wilderness the tabernacle of testimony refers to the position saints have in the world; they are there for testimony, and the whole of the twelve tribes were ordered in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. Now that is our position viewed as in the world; we are set in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. Our great business in this world is, not to be comfortable in our domestic lives or successful in business, but to be identified with the tabernacle of God's testimony. The tabernacle was set up at Shiloh, and it is an immense thing to reach such a point. The tabernacle is the place where God dwells; "They shall make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them", Exodus 25: 8.

If we have the thought of a dwelling for God, everything must be regulated and ordered and distributed according to God. It is a universal idea. The tabernacle at Shiloh was a central point for all Israel; the thought of God dwelling among His people is a universal idea. If God dwells among His people we must respect everything that is of God. When people go into a church they take their hats off; they recognise the place they are in as the house of God, and they treat it with respect. That is a right idea, but it is applied in a material way. It is a right idea to have reverence for the place where God dwells, but He does not dwell in any building of stone or brick; He dwells in His people. We are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit — that answers to Shiloh.

There must be holy conditions. We could not connect anything unholy with the place where God dwells; no insubjection or unholiness can be there — "Holiness becomes thy house, O Jehovah, for ever", Psalm 93: 5. In the light of that we have to see the divine way in which the inheritance is taken up; there is a divine way and it cannot be taken up any other way. Everything is apportioned. There were seven tribes, giving the thought of spiritual completeness, not twelve but seven. We can take up things in a spiritual way even in the presence of all the outward ruin.

All is by lot; it is a question of divine appointment. It would affect us very much to take account of divine appointment in view of enjoying the inheritance. There is divine appointment in Numbers, each tribe set in an

appointed place in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. But in the land it is not a question of testimony but of enjoyment.

The whole assembly of the children of Israel were gathered together at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting; they moved together. All is ordered in view of the enjoyment of the inheritance. We have noticed in reading these chapters that when the inheritance of the tribes is described in detail each tribe has dependent villages or hamlets, or, as the margin reads, farmhouses, which brings it down to household character. We have to take account of all that spiritually to see how the inheritance is enjoyed, and the New Testament gives us the answer to it. That is, the saints are divinely set together that they may enjoy the inheritance together; first in households, then in assemblies, and then in a more general way, and I do not think we shall enjoy the inheritance if we do not take up these divine thoughts. It must have an answer at the present time. The basis on which all assembly enjoyment rests is household enjoyment; so it begins with what is described as farmhouses, the holding of each household. If Christian households do not enjoy things together there is a defect at the foundation. The assembly according to God is made up of households; that is why in the epistles where the saints are viewed as over Jordan we have so much said about husbands, wives, parents, children, masters and servants; it is a household character of things. Where right conditions do not obtain in Christian households, the inheritance is not enjoyed.

There are some households where the Lord's interests govern, and it is not difficult to introduce the Lord's things. I went to a household lately where I was delighted to find that the father, mother, and all the children were perfectly free to speak of their spiritual exercises, and there were even young children. You cannot bring that about to suit the occasion; it is characteristic. That is the basis of things. Suppose you get a number of households like that, what beautiful material it would be for local assemblies! The work of God in Europe began with households. There was the jailor's and Lydia's. Order in God's house is dependent on the order of our own households — "If one does not know how to conduct his own house, how shall he take care of the assembly of God", 1 Timothy 3:5.

Then we find there are cities; each tribe has a specified number of cities. The cities would answer, I think, to local assemblies. It is not accidental that the saints are set together in local assemblies; God has set them together that they might enjoy the inheritance. It is not now the testimony, as in Numbers, but it is now the inheritance. Are my relations with my brethren such that they contribute to my enjoyment of the inheritance? We cannot enjoy it without the

brethren. The result of Paul's and the other apostles' labours was that assemblies were formed in Judaea and in the Gentile world, so we read that the assemblies had rest, and Paul went about confirming the assemblies, and he speaks about the assemblies of the saints. It is divine order; we cannot create something. People think sometimes that brethren have created a new order according to their own minds; if we have, it is sure to come to nothing, but we must recognise what God has created, and God has set His people in local assemblies.

Suppose one individual in a town got light from God as to the inheritance and the way it could be enjoyed, he would begin to look out for another. He would not have to look long; he would find somebody who had the same exercises and desires, and, the moment there are two, you have the thing in principle. So the Lord says "two of you" — it brings it down to the smallest number. Two saints can walk together and enjoy the inheritance. We are apt not to attach sufficient value to the fact that we are set in local assemblies; and there are not only cities but cities grouped together in tribes. We have the thought in Scripture of the grouping of assemblies; for instance, it speaks of the assemblies of God which are in Judaea in Christ Jesus. Then there was an important letter addressed to the assemblies in Galatia, and we read about the assemblies in Macedonia. That is the idea of assemblies being grouped together. When the assemblies in Macedonia sent a contribution to the poor saints in Judaea, it was two tribes linked together in the bonds of divine love.

Saints make themselves very unhappy by moving in their own wills, and they miss the joy of the inheritance. The choice of the creature is always wrong. Lot chose; the thing for us is to accept the setting where we are. If the Lord moves us, it is different; God moved Priscilla and Aquila from Rome to Corinth. Providentially He allowed the command that all Jews were to leave Rome; God knew what He was doing when He allowed the imperial edict to go forth. He wanted to move a brother and sister to Corinth because He intended setting up a local assembly at Corinth. Our thought in moving should be, is it God's way to contribute to His assembly there? Is that the prime thought if I move? Is it with a view to enjoying the inheritance and contributing to the saints? The voluntary idea is not right; we find in Scripture that God sets persons in a certain position and in certain relations. The Levites had their service appointed; it was never said to a Levite, You do what you like in the tabernacle. They each had their appointed work, and all was under the ordering of Aaron or Eleazar. "The whole decision is of the Lord". Could I say, I am locally in Teignmouth by the decision of the Lord?

We need not have any question at all if God providentially moves us. The exercise comes when we move ourselves apart from His providence. If we have gone anywhere because it is the will of God, we remain there and recognise our links with the brethren as a means by which we enjoy the inheritance. That is the setting in which we enjoy the inheritance and we cannot enjoy it any other way. No movement on our part can secure to us the enjoyment of the inheritance; we must either take it up in a divine way or miss it. What are we after? It tests the whole principle on which we are. Our households, our local setting in the assembly, and our relation with neighbouring assemblies, are to be governed by the principle of God dwelling in the midst of His people, He has put us divinely together so that we might enjoy the inheritance together.

We see the saints builded together at the end of Ephesians 2; then in chapter 3 there is a parenthesis which goes on to chapter 4, where we are seen together in that beautiful spirit of meekness, lowliness, long-suffering, and forbearance; we are on that principle together. And then we find the distribution, "To each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ". What a wonderful endowment! Do we believe it? No two of us have the same grace. The inheritance is so big that it takes all the saints on earth to occupy it. "To each one of us is given grace". I may not utilise it or work it out, but the grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. In speaking of the assembly lower down in the same chapter it says, "according to the working in its measure of each one part". The inheritance is so vast that it takes all saints to occupy it and enjoy it. My exercise is that I should take up my part in the measure of the grace given, and that I am working as one of the parts. We are put together that there might be this beautiful divine working, so that the inheritance might be enjoyed.

I think that we suffer, in one sense, from the truths recovered at the Reformation being so largely individual. The church had become such a corrupt and idolatrous system that there was a recoil from that; pious persons fell back on what was individual and on the enjoyment of what was individual, and they rather lost sight of the divine setting in which they were placed with other saints, so they formed a voluntary system and set up national churches. The divine thought is that the whole body is set together, and being so we have not to set up anything or to form any organisation; we have to come into the light of what is divinely constituted and take it up in the Spirit of Christ, and then we shall have great enjoyment of the inheritance. Am I full of joy? If not, there is something obstructing my enjoyment of the inheritance.

We have to recognise divine sovereignty. From the beginning we were born of God according to His own disposition, and the place where we live is according to God's disposition. If we have been moving in the fear of God, we are put where God would have us, and the local assembly is where we enjoy our inheritance in company with the people of God. It is expressly said that Joshua divided the inheritance by lot. Each tribe had its divine allotment. These great divine thoughts are essential to our enjoyment of the inheritance. We cannot make divine thoughts bend to our ideas. We must conform to divine thoughts and cherish them, and not expect them to conform to us. There is no assembly teaching in Romans, but it is remarkable that there are five allusions to the assembly in the last chapter, and that provides a link between Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians. Corinthians gives the assembly in the wilderness aspect, and Ephesians in the aspect of being over Jordan. When we come to the end of Romans we find a loose link hanging there like the end of a railway carriage which is going to be coupled to something else. Ephesians is the next coach: the mystery is the link. There are five specific references to the assembly at the end of the epistle, showing that all the truth of Romans is to be taken up in assembly setting. We cannot have an individual enjoyment of what is in Christ outside the assembly setting.

Another feature that comes out in the distribution of the inheritance is the irregularity of the boundary lines. According to Ezekiel in the coming day they will be long lines drawn straight across the land. There will not then be the same need for brotherly giving and taking as there is now. So we find that whilst a large portion was given to Judah, yet Simeon had in result to have his portion within the territory of Judah. That is a great test and involves a tax on Judah's love for his brother. God delights to bring that out, and He gives occasion for it in the irregularity of the boundary lines; it gives occasion for brotherly consideration and grace in one another. Unless we are on good terms with our neighbour we cannot take in the universal thought. So the borders of the land give occasion for the development of love: "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love; using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace", Ephesians 4: 2, 3.

JOSHUA 20

Joshua 20

It is interesting to see in Scripture that God not only makes known to us His mind, what is in accord with His own thoughts, but He makes provision for what is very abnormal. I suppose that comes out in the cities of refuge: nothing could be more abnormal than that Israel should slay their Messiah, and the fact that it was done unwittingly made it in one sense more sad.

Although Peter said, "by wicked hands have crucified and slain", he also said. "through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers", Acts 2:23; chapter 3:17. But how dreadful that God should have to take account of the state of His people being such that they might even do such a thing unwittingly! The Lord Himself said, "they know not what they do". It was a dreadful thing to have to say, but it only serves to bring out the provision of God in view of the most abnormal state of things. We can see how this applies to Israel, and I think there is an application which is very encouraging and helpful for ourselves. That is, we can all realise that the division of the inheritance and the enjoyment of it together cannot be taken up normally today. Normally every Christian household would be right, the whole company of saints in each city would form one local assembly. We must be prepared to take things up in a way suitable to God, and suitable to abnormal conditions.

The man who killed his neighbour, even unwittingly, forfeited all title to live in the inheritance. He would be exposed to the activities of the avenger of blood; he would have lost what might be called the normal enjoyment of the inheritance. Have we not lost it? A great many things have been done, and in many cases done unwittingly, but they have brought about a state of things in which the normal enjoyment of the inheritance cannot be had. So, if things are to be taken up, they will have to be taken up in an abnormal way. The cities of refuge are abnormal.

When Israel killed their Messiah they forfeited all title to divine promises and blessing. Peter in Acts 2 and 3 presses that home to them, and Paul in speaking to the Jews at Antioch says the same; but both Peter and Paul open up cities of refuge for them, and show that, though the most abnormal thing possible has taken place, yet God has His own thought in reserve and has opened up a city of refuge. What could be more abnormal than that the Messiah, who came with His hands full of blessings for His people Israel, should be crucified and slain, and that it should be done unwittingly! Yet Peter and Paul show that the choicest blessings of the covenant and inheritance are still available. Peter dwells on the gift of the Spirit in Acts 2, and Paul refers to

their having judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. The choicest blessings of the Spirit and eternal life could all be enjoyed on the principle of the city of refuge; everyone could get these things as refugees.

In Acts 2 they say, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They owned that they had done a dreadful deed; but they had done it unwittingly and were prepared to enter the city of refuge. Peter was at the gate to gather them in, and the elders were gathered together in the city. The epistle to the Hebrews shows what can be enjoyed by those who have fled for refuge; they are the people who obtain the inheritance, who get the enjoyment of all the unchangeable purposes of God; but it is enjoyment on the principle of the city of refuge. I believe, if we are to enjoy the inheritance, we must be prepared to enjoy it on that principle.

The slaying of the Lord Jesus is peculiarly the sin of the Jews, but the sin of the Christian profession corresponds to it. The sin of the Christian profession is the setting aside of the Spirit. I think that answers in the Christian profession to the slaying of the Messiah. Everything was bound up in the Messiah for Israel; if they killed the Messiah they cut themselves off from everything. For us everything lies vitally in the Holy Spirit, and if we set aside the Holy Spirit we set aside all the true power of Christian blessing: that is the sin of christendom. The Holy Spirit is dishonoured and displaced: it is done unwittingly, but nevertheless the consequences are tremendous. It is a wonderful testimony to the heart of God that He does take account of things done unwittingly. I believe that God looks down on the state of the Christian profession, and He sees that the enjoyment of the inheritance has been forfeited through the dishonour done to the Holy Spirit and the setting aside of Him practically. God in His wondrous grace and forbearance takes account of that as done unwittingly. His people do not know what they are doing. So the principle of the city of refuge comes in for us now; we have to be content to enjoy the inheritance in conditions of strict limitations.

It is written in Numbers 35:26: "If the manslayer shall in any way come outside the limits of the city of his refuge whither he hath fled, and the avenger of blood find him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kill the manslayer, there shall be no blood-guiltiness upon him; for the manslayer should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest". I suppose the death of the high priest refers to the fact that the present priestly position of the Lord Jesus will not continue for ever. He is in a priestly place at the right hand of God, but then there will be a change. The dispensation will change altogether, and, when Christ is a Priest on His throne according to Zechariah 6, Israel will no longer be restricted:

Israel will go back to normal enjoyment of the inheritance. And when the rapture comes we shall no longer be restricted; we shall be under no limitations, but we shall go back to the heavenly inheritance without restrictions. This dispensation will have ceased. The principle of the city of refuge is provisional; it holds sway for a certain length of time, and it imposes strict limitations.

I think that 2 Timothy gives us the principle of the city of refuge, because the state of the Christian profession has become such as is described there. Men are lovers of their own selves, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. They are going on with many things quite inconsistent with the enjoyment of the inheritance; that is the state of the public Christian profession. Paul says, "In the last days difficult times shall come". How can people like that enjoy the inheritance? The question is, Do we want to enjoy it? If we do, we must be content to flee into the city of refuge.

The moment the church is seen as fallen, as it is at Ephesus, there is the call to repent. They might have fallen into that state unwittingly, but they did not remain in it unwittingly after the Lord called attention to it. That is the solemn thing. If the Lord calls attention to something which is contrary to His mind, it is not unwitting after that; it becomes deliberate. The position of things today is analogous to the position of Israel. When God by His servants called attention to what had been done, it was no longer a question of "unwittingly"; divine light had been shed on the position and the people who had heard the preaching were at once divided into two classes. There were those who repented and availed themselves of the cities of refuge, and there were those who, so to speak, endorsed what had been done and went on with it. They went on until they came under the hands of the avenger of blood; and that is what the Christian profession is going on to. It is going on to a most certain and appalling judgment. It is a solemn thing to go back and deliberately do a thing after God has called attention to it. There was a possibility of the Hebrews, who had fled for refuge, going back and putting themselves deliberately under the guilt of what God had taken account of as done unwittingly — crucifying the Son of God.

The cities of refuge were all levitical cities, which is very suggestive; they would be marked by the ministry of the word, which answers to the apostles' teaching. God has raised up in these last days a wonderful ministry of the word, and the city of refuge is characterised by a spiritual ministry in contrast with the defective and erroneous ideas all around. There is spiritual light and instruction. Every city of refuge was full of Levites. Paul called attention to his doctrine; and the things that Timothy had learned from him were to be

committed to faithful men. He called attention to the Holy Scriptures, and gave great place to ministry and divine instruction. That is what gives character to the city of refuge. Christians generally had left the city of refuge; all in Asia had turned away. They had departed from what was levitical and priestly, for all that was levitical and priestly was personified in Paul. Paul in 2 Timothy lays down the constitution of the city of refuge; there is to be a judgment of all contrary to the mind of God and separation from it, and walking with the saints on a certain restricted basis.

The limitations should not be felt as a deprivation, but as a privilege. What a wonderful thing to be kept in a sphere where we do not have the intrusion of all kinds of evil! I look out on beloved Christians in the profession. They are exposed to every kind of evil, and they know it and they groan under it, but they have no locks or bars to keep it out. What a terrible position to be in! Every year you find some fresh inroad of error. Why? Because there are no walls to the city; it is a kind of open place and anything can come in.

In a city of refuge a man got what was universal in a peculiar way; he had it in connection with what was levitical and priestly. The Levites and priests built the cities of refuge, and they had a universal outlook, the Levites were for all Israel and the priests were for all Israel. We get the enjoyment of what is universal, not by actual contact with our brethren, but in the light of spiritual and priestly ministry. How could we touch it any other way? I do not think the Levites or the priests ever give us a limited outlook. The Levites serve in all Israel, and every priest has a universal interest in the people of God. Now we can take it all up, but in a restricted way.

We do not, alas, come in contact with our brethren universally; the conditions are such that it is impossible to do so. That is why it is impossible to enjoy the inheritance normally today, but it can be enjoyed in a restricted way in the city of refuge. Those there had the best of it; they had the fruit of the land without doing a hand's turn for it. They lived on the tithes; the best the land produced was carried into those cities. So while there was restriction in being confined to the city, yet it was full of the whole wealth of the land; there were no restrictions on enjoyment. A manslayer was better off than anyone else. In Malachi the windows of heaven were opened and they are opened today, and God is sending down a blessing so great that there is not room to receive it. That is the great trouble today. People want more blessing, but I feel I want more expansion.

I think that the whole wealth of the inheritance is being ministered bountifully at the present time by the Lord's servants who are in the secret of His mind. How could anyone feel that he was shut up spiritually? We are outwardly

restricted, but inwardly we can expand in the full wealth of the inheritance. We can enjoy ministry and participate in what is priestly, and realise our links with the saints universally, but realise it in a spiritual way and accept the outward restrictions. That is the principle of the city of refuge.

The elders represent the responsible element in the city of refuge. They look out for anyone seeking admission. The elders take him in, or “gather” him. They hear what he has to say and find out whether what has happened has been done unwittingly. He has been involved in many things contrary to God, and now he realises it. That is exactly the exercise that many Christians have had during the last hundred years; they have realised that they have been identified with what is contrary to God’s mind. It has been brought to their knowledge through the grace of God, through the ministry of the word. What they have done was done unwittingly, but now they know it and they want to avail themselves of the provision.

A man who felt that the avenger of blood was on his track would put as much pace on as he could. We ought to feel more seriously than we do the state of the Christian profession. We do not feel half seriously enough how the Spirit is displaced and the divine order set aside, and all kinds of things carried on that are contrary to the whole nature of the dispensation and would hinder the inheritance being enjoyed, and expose the people of God to every kind of danger and injury. If we felt it more, we should be more energetic to reach the city of refuge and to stop there.

The assembly is responsible to make a difference between what is unwittingly done and what is wittingly done. We come across believers who are going on with the light they have, they do many things for want of light; God has never brought to them the light of things. We regard these persons with a compassionate interest and affection; our hearts go out to them wherever we come across them, and we are thankful for the little light they have. But if we bring light to that person and show them the true mind of God — the headship of Christ and the presence of the spirit and the constitution of the assembly — and they resent it and deliberately turn it down, they are in quite a different position. That is why it is so serious to bring people light. The Christian profession at the present time as a whole is guilty of having turned from the light that God has given them; a tremendous inroad of darkness and evil is coming in as a divine judgment on those who have deliberately refused the light. It is a very solemn position.

JOSHUA 21

Joshua 21

We come in this chapter to the climax of the book. The Levites had their definite place in all Israel, which I take to be the crowning feature in the book. Eleazar is mentioned before Joshua here, suggesting that the priestly element has the most prominent place in the allotment of the land, and in securing what is for the pleasure of God. The bringing in of the priest would indicate that the thing is looked at from the standpoint of the pleasure of God — not merely that the people get a good portion, but that there is a ministering to God. It is said of the priest, "He shall minister to me in the priest's office". Securing God's portion is greater than the inheritance, and that is suggested in this chapter. The inheritance having been divided, and the cities of refuge introduced as a gracious provision, now we come to what I consider to be the climax of the book. The priest secures things for God. The priests and Levites represent what is for God; the inheritance is for man. The inheritance is not an end in itself, but a means to an end; all the blessing and wealth which God bestows on His people, immense as it is, is not God's end, but a means to an end.

The end is that God should have His place in the midst of His people. These forty-eight cities for the Levites were distributed among all the tribes. The Levites represented what was for God; that is why they were so carefully excluded from participating in the inheritance. Almost every scripture that refers to the Levites calls attention carefully and specifically to the fact that the Levite has no part in the inheritance; he represents another idea greater than the inheritance, and the inheritance is a means to reach it. The Levites represent what is for God; we see that at the beginning. God said, Sanctify to me the first-born. Every first-born is hallowed, that is the basis of the levitical idea. Afterwards God took the tribe of Levi in place of all the first-born; they were hallowed or sanctified to Him. The Levites and their cities represent God's portion, but the inheritance is our portion.

The Levites represented first-born sons and the assembly of the first-born ones enregistered in heaven, but the great thought here is that the pleasure of God in a priestly way is secured. There is a close link between priesthood and sonship. In Ephesians we read of "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints", Ephesians 1: 18. God has His portion, His inheritance. For God to enjoy what is due to Him must be greater than for me to enjoy God's gifts. If I enjoy what His love has given, that is very blessed; nothing could be more

blessed for the creature; but is it to stop there? If it does, the creature is to be everything and God nothing; and that would not do.

When the tent of meeting is set up at Shiloh, there is a divine gathering centre where all the tribes come, and in connection with that the inheritance is apportioned. The levitical cities are seen in connection with the divine gathering centre. I believe that in the last hundred years the Lord has given His people to come in some measure to the divine gathering centre, and the result of the movement of separation from human ordinances to the divine gathering centre has been that there has been light as to the inheritance and as to the principles of God's ways, and light as to what is due to God and His holy service. That is connected with the Levites; they are altogether set apart for the service of God. Christ is the true Shiloh — Shiloh means *He whose right it is*. As He has His right place as the true gathering centre, everything falls into its divinely appointed place in the inheritance — the cities of refuge, and the Levites. Everything falls into its appointed place if we know what is to come to Shiloh.

The cities of the Levites were distributed in Israel; in every tribe there was a levitical city. They were within reach of every Israelite. God kept before the people that there was something greater than the inheritance; if we kept that before us it would have a profound effect on us. We are so self-centred even as to our own blessings. When I was a young Christian and first began going through the villages trying to speak to people, one of the first things I noticed was that people were very interested if one spoke to them about what was for them, but they were not interested if one spoke ever so feebly about what was for God. The moment you give the Levite a place, they are not interested. The Levites were entirely separated to be for God; God was their portion. If we look at the references to Levites in this book we shall find it very interesting — see chapter 13: 33; chapter 14: 3; chapter 18: 7. God is calling attention in the references to the Levites to the fact that they had something better than the inheritance. The One who gave the inheritance is greater than the inheritance, and the offerings by fire were His own peculiar portion. The priesthood was what God had, and God points out that what was for Him was greater than what was for man.

The sons of Aaron had thirteen cities and the rest of the Kohathites had only ten. The Levites had two great offices, as we see in Deuteronomy 33: 8: "Thy Thummim and thy Urim are for thy godly one, whom thou didst prove at Massah ... They shall teach Jacob thine ordinances, and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thy nostrils, and whole burnt-offerings upon thine altar". That was the place of the Levites; they were to teach and to offer. The

last three verses of the chapter are brought in after the allocation of the cities of the Levites.

Not a single thing had failed, every enemy was laid low, and every thought of God was fulfilled. If we give what is due to God in connection with His service, we shall find there will not be a single thing lacking on our side. We shall get the full satisfaction of every spiritual desire if we give God His whole portion. The Levite was a man who had God before him, and who considered for God: if he taught the people God's law and covenant, and if he offered sacrifices unto God, he was thinking of the pleasure of God — that is the crown of everything. We are never so happy, our cup never so full and running over, as when in some measure we are able to minister to God. The great tendency is to put the levitical thought out of its place and make it consist in ministering to man: I do not think that is the thought at all. The pleasure of God is to be secured in His people by instruction; there is the instruction side of the levitical service, "They shall teach thy law", and there is the sacrificial side, but both have in view the pleasure of God.

Abraham had to recognise that there was something greater than the land, because he gave tithes to Melchisedec — see Hebrews 7. The great vessel of promise, the one to whom God had sworn that He would give the land, had to recognise that there was something greater than the inheritance; he found himself in the presence of the priest of the most High God, and he gave him tithes of all he had. The service of God was greater to Abraham than the inheritance, and it ought to be to all of us. Why do we come to the prayer meeting? Is it to get a little comfort after a trying time? We can get it, but is that all? No, we come to serve God in a priestly way in connection with His interests and glory and all that is due to Him. Then in coming together to eat the Lord's supper we do not lose sight of our side; it is a most precious ministry to us of the love of Christ. The Lord Himself calls attention to it — "This is my body which is for you", that is our side. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" — that is our side. But if we really take it up, it would qualify us to minister to Him. We should think of the profound joy that is found in ministering to the Lord and in carrying on His service. We can go up to Jerusalem, to what is universal. We leave what is local and connected with time, and go up to minister there to the pleasure of God. See the great place God has in Ephesians; we should all read and study that epistle in connection with our present subject. In chapter 2 we have the saints in all the full enjoyment and blessedness of the inheritance, but what is the end in view? If we read the epistle carefully, we notice the immense place that God has in it. The whole drift of the epistle to the Ephesians is intended to work out to the end that there should be glory to God in the assembly in

Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. God is to have His portion, and that is involved in this levitical chapter; so it is the crown and climax of the book.

It is good to realise what we mean when we sing, "Eternity's begun". When saints come together in assembly it is a great thing for them to realise, if only for two minutes, that eternity has begun: a character of things has come about, even here and now, that is properly eternal in its character. God is getting what is due to Him and what will be His satisfaction and joy throughout eternity.

We begin by thinking of Christ in relation to ourselves, but the turning point in our spiritual history is when we begin to think of Him in relation to the pleasure of God. When you kneel down in private you feel you have something that sets aside all your little anxieties, worries, and cares, and you can speak to God of His delight in Christ. I wonder if we do. We pray about all kinds of things connected with ourselves, our spiritual exercises, our soul needs, what we would like to feel. That is not ministering to the pleasure of God. If you can speak to Him of Christ, His delight in His beloved Son, you have the Levite and have given him his city. We are full of infirmity and we find ourselves pressed and pre-occupied with a thousand things; the least little thing distracts us. We go and pray; one thing after another comes into our minds and we do not get to God; but the Priest is for all that weakness. If I am distracted with a thousand things, I need the Priest, and He is able to set me free — I have proved that He can. I have gone to God with many burdens, and in half an hour I have been ashamed that they ever were burdens.

We need to get over to the levitical side: the Levite thinks of what is due to God, and he looks at the people of God in relation to the pleasure of God. Paul preached the gospel in a levitical and priestly way: "carrying on as a sacrificial service the message of glad tidings of God, in order that the offering up of the nations might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit", Romans 15: 16. Paul wanted something for God. I am to go out to tell poor sinners how good God is, but I am to do it all with a view to God getting something. I am carrying out a sacrificial service. Paul was a true Levite. I heard once of a young man who was brought into fellowship through hearing a young man preach in the street. He went home and said to his wife, 'We often preach in the street, but we consider for man, but that young man I heard preach considered for God'. That brought him out from what he was in and brought him into fellowship. He found a levitical city.

The thought of rest is introduced in three connections in this book. First in connection with the enemies being all destroyed so that the land had rest from

war; and secondly in connection with the allotment of the inheritance — the people of God get their assigned portions. Then thirdly at the end of chapter 21 it is introduced in connection with the Levites having their portion; so the complete thought of God is reached. Not only are the enemies destroyed, and the inheritance possessed, but provision is made, as a result of that, so that the pleasure of God is served. Priestly and levitical service become universally characteristic of Israel. The complete thought of God is secured; the climax of the book is reached.

JOSHUA 22

Joshua 22

In this chapter we find that there are certain tribes who are content to drop down to a lower ground than that which was the thought of God. They could be spoken of as faithful to the words spoken through Moses, and they could not be charged with any sin. They are blessed by Joshua, but notwithstanding they are prepared to take up a lower ground than the thought of God for His people; it was not all that Jehovah had said for His people. It is not that they have not received something from God. They have a great deal, a divinely assigned portion; but the question for us is, Have we all that God in love has given? Have we entered into the inheritance according to God's thought?

God can only be pleased and properly served according to His own thoughts. We might be prepared to fight for the inheritance and yet be content not to live there. That was so with these tribes; they were ready to fight for it, but they did not care to live in it. If some conflict arose about the truth, and the heavenly calling and portion of the saints, some of us might be prepared to go to war about it, but the question is, Do we want to live there? Many have been valiant in contesting about things that they have never enjoyed. These two tribes were willing to fight for a place in which they had no desire to dwell. When the enemies had been defeated and the land possessed, they were quite content to go back to the east side of Jordan and live there.

The nine and a half tribes were conscious they were on true ground; to put it in our language, they were on true assembly ground. They said, "Thus saith the whole assembly of Jehovah" and "the land of the possession of Jehovah, where Jehovah's tabernacle dwelleth". They were standing on true assembly ground and they knew it quite well. They showed a beautiful brotherly spirit; they said, "If your possession is unclean, come over into the land of the possession of Jehovah". But the fact was that the tribes took lower ground in going back to the east side of Jordan, and God permitted it. He does allow His people to take up what answers to it. He says, so to speak, If you do not want my land, if you are thinking of yourselves and your cattle, and what suits you, you can have it. God does not deal arbitrarily with His people; if we are content with a small measure we can have it.

It appears that these tribes were not altogether comfortable. They had a distinct feeling that they were taking up ground different from what their brethren stood on. Something was needed to keep up the link with the inheritance, so an artificial and human expedient was tried which proved ineffectual. They departed out of the land of Canaan and left Shiloh, the true

gathering centre, where the tabernacle was in the land of Canaan; they left all that. It was not that they ceased to be the people of God, or to have the blessing of God, but they went away from everything that was most precious. To my mind it answers to what Paul said to Timothy, "Thou knowest this, that all who are in Asia ... have turned away from me", 2 Timothy 1: 15.

The nine and a half tribes show a lovely spirit. They say, If your inheritance is unclean, if you are not at rest, come back. They had no hesitation as to the right ground, but they say to the others, 'If you are uncomfortable, come over, but do not let us have a sectional movement, or set up a rival centre of worship. We cannot admit of anything like that; it must be war if you are going to have a sectional movement; we cannot tolerate that; the whole assembly stands for that'. It shows the kind of spirit that would animate those who live in the inheritance. They would like all the brethren to come over; they are not exclusive in that sense.

As a matter of fact the motives of the two and a half tribes were good; there might be that and yet lower ground taken than the calling of God would allow. They set up an altar of grand appearance. They betrayed an uneasy feeling that they were breaking the link, and therefore some human expedient had to be adopted to keep it up. All Christians would admit that it was wrong for Christians to be divided: so they have human expedients. They form evangelical alliances — that is a beautiful altar to look at, but it is a human expedient.

What they said was true: "Your children will say to our children, What have ye to do with Jehovah the God of Israel? Jehovah hath made the Jordan a border between us and you". If we live on the wrong side we shall want a grand altar to remind us that we are linked with the children of God who enjoy the inheritance. If we dwell on the responsible side we shall miss what is most pleasurable to God. There is a land of which He says, It is the glory of all lands; His eyes and His heart are there perpetually. That is never said of the land on the east side of Jordan. The west side is what His love delights in. Do we love God enough to be able to say truly that nothing will satisfy us to receive but what satisfies God to give? That is the whole thing. What does the love of God give? If I get some apprehension of what the love of God may give, nothing less will do for me.

I suppose that those who forsook Paul went on with assembly order, they broke bread every first day of the week, and they observed all the instructions. The epistle to the Ephesian assembly in Revelation 2 shows where they had reached. They were exceedingly jealous for God's name and divine principles; they did not tolerate any kind of evil, but the Lord says, You have left your first

love; you have fallen; repent, and do the first works. They were all breaking bread and maintaining what was right, but they had slipped away in their affections. Paul had said that all in Asia had turned away from him; but John throws further light on it. He shows the condition of these assemblies; it was not that they were not believers or not blessed of God, but they had dropped down to a lower plane; they were not going on to the highest thoughts of God. The two and a half tribes moved on that line. They chose their inheritance on the east side, and God acquiesced and allowed them to have their inheritance on that side, but that did not make the east side of Jordan the proper side to live on.

The altar of grand appearance is a poor substitute for the tabernacle of Jehovah. The tabernacle was the point of unity. The enjoyment of the inheritance together constitutes real unity. If people go out of fellowship, they have not been enjoying the inheritance with their brethren, so they come to think that there is something better elsewhere. The altar was intended to be a witness that Jehovah was God, but then it was a witness all the time to them that they were not dwelling where Jehovah's tabernacle was. The idea was not to set up another centre of worship; they disclaimed that and were able to clear themselves before their brethren of rebellion or independence; they did not want to set up another centre. The unity is connected with the place where God dwells — that is the great point in Ephesians 2, where we have one new man and one body, and access to the Father by one Spirit. These are spiritual thoughts that are only realities on the west side of Jordan, and then we can have the saints builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. There is real power for unity in that. It is not that people profess certain principles, but they are in the vitality of things. It is a vital fellowship, not simply principles, or that we all break bread together. I do not care for outward fellowship if inward fellowship is not there. Right principles are like the walls of a house — there is no comfort in a house if there are no walls. They keep out the wind and the weather, but walls are not the comfort of the house. That lies in the furniture and the family affections we have there; the home is there. Divine principles are all external; they safeguard the affections, but the real bond of unity is the enjoyment together of things connected with the affections. If we are not set for that, the outward fellowship is not worth much. If you have only principles, you have only walls; they are important because they protect all that is inside; but, if there is nothing inside, what is the good? It is an empty shell. The principles of fellowship are but walls; they are preservative. What is there to be preserved? We shall never have unity in any spiritual sense apart from enjoyment of the inheritance. I wish we could give our brethren the impression that we are having the finest times

conceivable and that we want them all with us. They look at the walls and do not know what is inside. Would not any lover of God want to be in a spot where God dwells, where saints are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit?

It is beautiful to find that this was felt throughout all Israel to be an assembly matter; it could not be tolerated in the assembly that there should be an independent or sectional movement; it must be put down with a firm hand. No other gathering centre could be tolerated. They have assembly exercise; they say, "Thus saith the whole assembly", and, again, "Jehovah will be wroth with the whole assembly of Israel". They quote the example of a man who had trespassed and wrath came on all the assembly; they take it up in the light of the assembly, of what was due to God. But they listen to the explanation of the two and a half tribes and bring word again to their brethren. "The children of Israel blessed God and no more said that they would go up in warfare against them".

Phinehas was a man who knew how to use a javelin; no one can use a javelin better than a priest. They made a good selection when they chose Phinehas to be head of the deputation. Then they chose princes, heads of families, the priestly estimate of what was due to God. These men were prepared to exterminate Reuben and Gad, not because they did not love them, but because they loved Jehovah and considered for Him and for His people — everything must be sacrificed to that. Phinehas had showed what he was made of; when the enemy had sought to corrupt Israel he executed summary judgement "He was jealous with my jealousy" — so Jehovah made with him a covenant of everlasting priesthood.

The heads of houses represented the whole assembly in its responsibility to preserve unflinchingly and uncompromisingly what was due to Jehovah; the whole assembly was there to maintain that. We want priest and princes; otherwise things are let go. These men did not say, It does not matter; there was no looseness there.

The two and a half tribes had not the tabernacle of Jehovah; it is a great test whether there is the presence of God with His people. I heard of a man who was a prominent preacher and went out of fellowship, and he said, after going about and trying the best of the religious world, There is no worship anywhere else. That is solemn. If there is only worship in one place one would like to be in that place. Shiloh is the place.

The two and a half tribes wanted a link with God's people.

It shows that inward intuitions are often right when course is wrong. Their inward intuition was right; they felt they were on different ground from their brethren, and they felt they must have some expedient to keep up the link; they were in a wrong position. Ultimately they were the first to go into idolatry and captivity. We have to judge things by their final issue.

JOSHUA 23

Joshua 23

This chapter would answer almost exactly to Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. Paul is our Joshua; he was the faithful leader by the Spirit of the people of God into the inheritance. As long as Paul lived things were preserved; there was no defection in Paul or in any of the apostles. It was not that they did not make blunders, but there was no defection; they were kept in the Father's name, kept in the unity of the testimony. They led the people into the inheritance, particularly Paul.

The point is reached here when Joshua is stricken in years. The time has come for him to depart, and things have to be transferred now from the spiritual power and energy in Joshua into the responsibility of all Israel. That is very much like Acts 20. Paul sent for the Ephesian elders and recounted to them the nature of his ministry, and not only the ministry in itself, but his own personal character as the minister; he brings all before them and then he speaks of his departure. The time had come for him to go, the spiritual vessel of uncorrupted truth has to go, and he transfers things into the responsibility of the elders of Ephesus, representing the responsible element in the assembly. Things pass out of the hands of the apostles into the hands of the saints generally.

Elements of departure are always in the human heart, and they appeared very quickly in the history of the church. Even before the apostles went, elements of departure were manifest upon all hands. It has pleased God that things should pass into the hands of His people as responsible; they passed out of the hands of the apostles into the hands of the church in responsibility. Now the question is, Has the church been faithful to the deposit? Has she maintained the grounds of the inheritance?

Paul referred to his ministry in the various features of it, but the final touch he gives is, "I have not shrunk from announcing to you the whole counsel of God". It was given to Paul as a special vessel of ministry to bring out the whole counsel of God — that would cover the inheritance. Paul was privileged to be the vessel of everything that God purposed in love to give His people; he brought it all out. All he has unfolded in the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, all that is connected with resurrection, being risen with Christ, being raised up together and seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus — that is the inheritance, all that is in the love of God and in the mind of God to bestow on His people. As far as Israel was concerned, the land was in the purpose of God for them, and Joshua tells them that everything spoken by God has been

brought to pass; nothing had failed. That answers very much to the epistle to the Ephesians. If we read Ephesians we shall see that nothing has failed that God has brought to pass in the purpose of His love. But then we should always read Ephesians alongside of Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, where he recalls to them the blessedness and perfection of the ministry, but he warns them of the possibility of defection — "after my departure". It is a solemn warning.

In this chapter Joshua is recounting to the people all that God had done. If one could chase a thousand, it was because God had done it. If they overcame all their enemies, it was because God had fought for them. Everything that had been done, God had done. We have to take account of that as one of the great divine facts. Whatever is spiritually wrought, God is the doer of it. If Joshua goes, or Paul goes, God does not go. When Paul is going to depart he says, "I commend you to *God* and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all the sanctified".

We have always to keep these things before us: the completion of everything on God's side, but then the solemn possibility of our missing it all. If I do not see the perfection of everything on God's side in Christ, I shall not be established in grace; if I do not see the possibility of departure, I shall get careless in responsibility. We want the two things rightly balanced in our souls if we are to be preserved. The character of a minister must correspond entirely with his ministry if things are to be maintained. Paul says, "Remember my labour, my ministry, the self-denying character of my service, and my tears, keep all that before you?" Why? Because it is a model of the spirit in which alone the inheritance can be held. We see the extraordinary power of God in Paul. It is wonderful that God preserved a man like Paul in moral suitability to the inheritance right to the end. It shows what God can do; it was God who did it. Paul says, "I commend you to God". It is the same God. It is a great encouragement to us; what ever was true in Paul was true in him by the power of God, and you and I have the same God and the same power. If Paul was about to depart, Paul's God would not depart, and Paul says, "I commend you to *God*". That is the only way that things are going to be maintained now; they are maintained by the power of the living God. So there is only one thing we need be afraid of, "lest there be in any one of you a wicked heart of unbelief in turning away from the living God", Hebrews 3:12.

The word of God's grace is the testimony of all that God is in grace; it would cover the whole truth of the revelation. God is speaking, not in the way of making demands, but in order to give expression to the immensity of His own

grace. Is not that exactly the character of the covenant? The covenant for us lies in the cup of which we drink. The word of the Lord is, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood". That is the covenant, it is the presentation to our hearts of all the blessed God is in His love, coming out to us through the death of Christ to bless us infinitely according to His own heart. We are apt to overlook the immense importance of a people being secured through the covenant to love God. I do not know that in the New Testament, in the teaching of the epistles, there is any command to love God, but it is distinctly stated that there are certain persons that love God. In a sense it is a characteristic designation of the saints that they love God.

Now we come to just two sets of influences: that is the influence of the love of God known in the bond of the covenant by His people; and then another set of influences represented by the nations of Canaan, the effect of which would be to entirely counteract the divine influence. We are tested by the kind of influences we allow our spirits to come under. Joshua says, in verse 7, "that ye enter not among these nations, that remain among you", and in verse 12 we find a cleaving to the residue of these nations and making marriages with them — there is progression in it. Spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies operates through persons, and therefore it is of the greatest importance that we should perceive our associations. Evil principles are not like things that float about in the air; they are moral influences that operate through persons, and very nice persons too. Joshua speaks about cleaving to them and making marriages with them; it suggests that these nations were rather attractive persons that we might not only cleave to but form relationships with. It is the nice people that we have to beware of. They were idolaters. There may be very nice people who are governed by what is natural, and not by God and by what is spiritual; and if we keep company with persons of that kind the subtle influence of what governs them will insidiously and unconsciously operate on us all the time. That is the serious thing of associations with those who as to their governing principles are of the world and not of God. Their gods are not to be mentioned or bowed down to. If we never mentioned them we should not bow down to them. We are apt to forget the power of evil, which as regards Christians operates chiefly, not through drunkards, thieves, corrupt immoral persons, but through nice people who are not at all governed by what is spiritual. Their thoughts, feelings, sensibilities and affections are governed by the natural, and all the time we spend with such people we come unconsciously under the influence of that kind of thing. It is impossible to maintain love to God under those conditions.

"The residue" suggests that the ground is not cleared. Canaan was never secure from hostile powers until the days of Solomon. In Solomon's day there

was no adversary occurrent, but we do not find that in Joshua, and the land today is not secure from hostile powers; they have to be resisted. We shall never enjoy the inheritance unless we learn to resist the hostile powers, and they chiefly operate through nice people whom we might cleave to and make marriages with. If such are not judged, the affections of the saints get corrupted. There are many such, professing Christians too, who are not governed by the Spirit. They are in the same land; they have their place in the sphere of divine blessing. Paul says, "Of your own selves shall men arise". Think of that! A man who was made overseer by the Holy Spirit of God may become the source of corrupt influence and speak perverse things, drawing disciples after him. That shows the subtle character of it. Nothing will do for us but to be set in our affections for what is of God, for what is spiritual, and to keep ourselves most carefully from associations with persons who are governed by other principles. However attractive they may be naturally, they can never help us in relation to God; they can only become, as this chapter says, a snare and a trap, and ultimately they will become a scourge and thorns in our eyes.

We must be careful also of their books. Books emanate from persons; a book is an extended influence of a person. When I read a book I put myself under the influence of the person who wrote it. What is his mind? What governs him? If he is spiritual, he loves God, and the Lord Jesus Christ is supreme with him, if he is walking in the Spirit, that man will help me. But if he is a man of the world, if he is a vessel of influences that are not of God, however attractive he may be, however nice his book may be, it will only be a trap and a snare to me. The nicer the book is, the more a trap it is.

There is nothing more encouraging to me than that the divine proposal is to love God with my whole mind and heart. J.N.D. said he thought he could say that he loved God with his whole heart, but he was not sure that he could say he loved Him with his whole mind. I know J.N.D. was a long way beyond me, but I am encouraged by the divine proposal that we are to love God with all our hearts and all our souls, all our minds and all our strength. That is the divine proposal, and God does not propose an impossibility which cannot come to pass. It is not possible to human nature, but God has given His Holy Spirit in order that what is impossible might become possible. I believe that if I loved God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength I should be as supremely happy now as I shall be in heaven, it is the supreme happiness of the creature. We think that God is demanding what we cannot give, but He is proposing the necessities of His own love; He is proposing a thought of supreme blessedness. Is it possible? Of course it is, if the Holy Spirit has come into the heart of the saints and is allowed to have His way, and to form those

divine affections which have their spring and object in God. It is a possibility. Some said that John 4 was a splendid impossibility, but J.B.S. said it was a splendid possibility.

These last two chapters of Joshua come in as a very solemn test to us. It is all very well to read about the enemies being all overthrown and the land possessed, but we have to face the test of it. Is it true? Are we living in the inheritance and enjoying it, loving God and enjoying all that His love gives, or have we some link with the nations, some underground passage which keeps up the connection with the influences of the world that are all contrary to God?

Joshua represents the spiritual leadership of Christ among His people. He does not represent Christ personally but the spiritual leading of Christ, such as is seen in Paul. We find Paul going straight on to the end; all he wanted was to finish his course, though bonds and imprisonment awaited him. It was not an easy path, but he wanted to finish his course. Six years later he wrote in 2 Timothy, "I have finished my course". He had done all he wanted to do; he went straight through and was never diverted from the inheritance. We could not say that Paul did not give us a proper lead into the inheritance, but he has gone now and the question is, What are we to do? We have the privilege of considering the ministry, service and character of Paul, and that is the kind of person who gets the inheritance and enjoys it, and stands fast in it. Are we to follow Paul so that we may enjoy the inheritance, or are we to come under the influence of the nations? In principle there are only two things; it is either Paul or the nations.

It is touching that Paul should speak to the Ephesian elders about "the assembly of God which he has purchased with the blood of his own". Think what it was to God to have you and me. He was prepared to pay that price; He purchased us with the blood of His own, and it is a matter of righteousness that He should have the affections of His people. He is always seeking their affections through the Supper. People say, I break bread because the Lord desired me to do it. Is that all? Are you not going deeper than that? There is a great deal more in it. Why did He desire it? What was His object? He thought of the effect of it on our spirits, the effect of His own love, so that that love might be impressed more deeply every first day of the week in indelible characters on our affections, so that we might love the Lord Jesus Christ and God, and thus enjoy the inheritance.

JOSHUA 24

Joshua 24

It is very striking how Jehovah in making this appeal through Joshua recounts all His former ways and all that He had done for His people, and He brings it to bear in a most touching way as a last appeal for faithfulness and devotion in service to Him. I would suggest that we have in the verses read from Joshua 24 what precisely answers in a typical way to the ministry of Paul.

In this chapter Jehovah goes back to the beginning of His ways: "Your fathers dwelt of old on the other side of the river, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river, and led him throughout the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed and gave him Isaac". God reminds His people that there had been a time when they were altogether beyond the pale. Euphrates was the boundary, the limit of that sphere which was in the thought of God for man's blessing, and He says: "Your fathers dwelt of old on the other side of the river ... and served other gods". I suppose what would answer to our being brought from the other side of the river is what the apostle speaks of as repentance towards God, and along with repentance there is faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. So, if God took Abraham from the other side of the river and from other gods, He gave Him Isaac. He gave him one in whom the covenant was established, in whom all nations should bless themselves. That is, He typically gave him the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is an immense thing to have that great blessing of which Paul testifies — repentance towards God. The real thought of repentance is not merely that a man feels he has done wrong but that he has lost his link with God. One doubts if there is any genuine repentance until there is a desire to know the living God. Paul said to the people of Lystra, We want you to turn from vanities to the living God. Paul speaks to the Thessalonians of the word of the report of God. The gospel brings report of what God is to man, and the first effect of that being received is repentance towards God; that is the judgment of everything that is on the other side of the river. All the other gods there are judged, because, if man has not the true God, he has other gods — man must venerate something.

Serving other gods was not the original state of man as belonging to Noah's household. We all belonged to Noah's household. Sometimes we forget Noah and go back to Adam — it would do us good to go back to Noah; he is the father of us all. We were all in Noah's household and in the ark, and when there we had the knowledge of the true God. All the millions living in this

world now were all represented in Noah's household and in the ark — that is what makes it so dreadful that they serve other gods. They have turned away from the blessed God whose grace and salvation they had proved in the ark. We have all stood round Noah's altar and worshipped the true God in figure. It is not a question of where Adam's sin put us — Adam's sin never made anyone idolatrous; there was no idolatry before the flood. But when God intervened in matchless grace and secured a saved household in the ark, that same household came out on the earth with the knowledge that God had saved them. It was a new beginning for the race of man, a new world; but the solemn thing is that, into that new world where God brought the knowledge of Himself in grace, idolatry came. It says of them that they served other gods; it was departure from the God they well knew. So if God comes in to secure something for Himself, He has to overcome the power of every other god; He has to show Himself superior in the conscience and affections of His creature to every other god, so that there may be repentance towards God, that we may judge everything that is of the nature of another god. We turn to God; I believe that is the essence of repentance.

The race has been influenced by Satan after God making Himself known as a Saviour God. After the time of the flood men allowed their hearts to be drawn away to other gods. God started in the pure sovereignty of mercy and called Abraham. What answers to the call of Abraham is that God brings about in our souls repentance towards Himself; it means the judgment of everything that has taken the place of God in our souls. It is remarkable that we have come into a world into which God has come as a Saviour God and has brought in Christ. So there is a ground on which men can repent, and they can turn back. We can all turn back to the God from whom we have departed; it is not only Adam that departed, but we have all departed in our thoughts and affections, and so the first step of blessing is that we repent towards God, and when we do we find what a wonderful thing God has done. He brought Abraham from the other side of the river, He freed him from other gods, and then He gave him Isaac, and all the families of the earth were to bless themselves in Isaac — God brought in Christ.

The next thing to notice is that they went down to Egypt to learn the favour of God, what blessed favour God had to them. That answers to Paul speaking of the glad tidings of the grace of God. In Egypt they learnt what God was; they were poor idolaters — God tells us so in Ezekiel 20 — they served other gods in Egypt. But God was favourable to them, and He delivered them at the Red Sea; the whole time they were in the wilderness they were learning God's favour. Every morning they found the manna and all spoke of God's favour to them; if they had not been in Egypt and had wilderness experience they would

not have known it in the same way. It was a wonderful lesson, so they could sing, "My strength and song is Jah, and he is become my salvation". In the song of Exodus 15 they call themselves His people "whom thou hast redeemed". We have to learn the grace of God experimentally in that way; we prove in our Egyptian and wilderness experience how favourable God is to us.

It is an immense thing to take these wonderful experiences in the stages in which God presents them. We have first to learn to repent towards God and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; that separates us from the world of the ungodly. It brings us from the other side of the river and from serving other gods; and then we go through an experience which answers to the affliction in Egypt, and we learn how favourable God is to us. It was an immense thing to me when I began to understand the favour of God to me; it was not until some time after I learned what it was to stand accepted before Him. We dwell a good deal on how we stand with God, and I thank God for it; but there is something more important, and that is how God stands with me, the infinite favour of God towards us through our Lord Jesus Christ. The radiant shining of the favour of God in the face of a glorified Man transcends everything that you can think of. God provides a lamb so that He can put the value of the precious blood on His people for a covering, and He can have them for Himself. It really means that God has put His wing over His people; not only is the destroying angel shut out, but God puts His wing over them. The only other scripture where the word *passover* occurs is that which speaks of Jehovah spreading His wings over His people (Isaiah 31: 5), He passes over and covers them through the death of Christ, and says, I am supremely favourable to them. And then He leads them through the Red Sea and brings His cloud between them and their enemies, and puts them on the other side with a song in their mouths. Then He starts in the wilderness and gives them a pillar of fire by night and of cloud by day. An Israelite could never look up without seeing the cloud of God's protecting love, as though God were saying, I am favourable to you. They were a poor, wretched, sinful people just like ourselves, and yet God all the time was bearing witness to His favour to them, giving them water from the rock, manna from heaven, preventing their clothes wearing out, and preserving them in a marvellous way for forty years, "nursing them in the desert", as Paul says. What a marvellous thing it is to know the grace and favour of God towards us! In spite of what I am, God is favourable to me through our Lord Jesus Christ. He says, as it were, I am delighted to be everything for you. That is the glad tidings. Who can joy in God if they do not know that? Many people joy in forgiveness, in acceptability, never a charge to be brought against them. They are justified — that is blessed — but we joy in

God when we see how favourable He is towards us; it is God Himself who blesses.

Jehovah goes on in verse 8 to speak of their going into the land of the Amorites, and He reminds them how His power had been with them to enable them to overthrow the nations on the east side of Jordan, and how Balaam came to curse but God made him bless them. What answers to that is the preaching the kingdom of God. Paul went about preaching the kingdom of God; that is power, not only grace but power. God did it so that Balaam had to say, "The shout of a king is amongst them". Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power", 1 Corinthians 4: 20. Here God reminds His people that He was among them in power; "no man has been able to stand before you unto this day", as we read in the previous chapter. Have we learned the kingdom? Have we learned that there is not a lust in the flesh that we cannot overcome in the power of the kingdom of God? The power comes in so that a Christian has power to carry out everything that is right in the sight of God — that is the kingdom of God. Balaam had to say, "His king shall be higher than Agag" — that is, it is a question of power.

Jehovah then speaks of the seven nations; He reminds them that they went over Jordan and met them, and "I delivered them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you as the two kings of the Amorites; not with thy sword, nor with thy bow. And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat", verses 12, 13. That is like Ephesians 2, and answers to Paul saying he had declared to them all the counsel of God. Everything that God had in His mind has come out; it is a heavenly inheritance. God is recounting here His ways with His people, His actings in and with them. Nothing is said of their condition but what was the fruit of divine power and grace in them; it is all the divine side, what can be ministered.

Paul calls attention to his ministry, and there was not a flaw in it. There is not a flaw in the blessed ministry which God has brought to us. He has brought to us the testimony of repentance towards Himself and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, the testimony of His favour to us and His grace, and He has brought to us the preaching of the kingdom of God, all His power for us and in us; and finally all His counsels. He has told us all that is in His heart for us — that is like Ephesians. And now what is to be the result? 'Will you serve me or not? Choose what you will do. I have told you what I am and what I have done, and now what will you do?' It is a most touching appeal. "And now fear Jehovah and serve him in perfectness and in truth; and put away the gods

which your fathers served on the other side of the river, and in Egypt; and serve Jehovah". It is a wonderful proposal that we should have the privilege of ministering to God. There is not a flaw in the blessed ministry that God has brought to us. People say we are such poor things! It is true, but that never carries anyone a step further spiritually. What will carry you on is what comes from God. Repentance towards God will carry you a long way; it will carry you to God. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ gives you much; it gives you all that the Lord Jesus Christ is. And the grace and favour of God give you a great deal. Then the kingdom of God gives you the power of the Spirit to go on, and the counsel of God — all these set us up. The devil would like us to say we are poor feeble things! All that is true, but nothing pleases the devil more than for us to dwell constantly on our feebleness and unworthiness, but it does not carry us a step further.

We have the thought of serving in this chapter: "Serve now Jehovah". God has come out in His wonderful grace that He might have sons to serve Him. It answers to John 4, where the Lord lets us into the secret of the giving of God, which answers to the four-fold ministry which we are speaking about. If you knew the beneficent God, how delighted He is to bestow these things, you would ask and get living water. If you only knew how favourable God is, you could get anything from Him. What a contrast to idols! They occupy us but they never confer anything on us; there was never an idol, another god, in this world that conferred anything on its worshippers. If you must have an idol it will be a burden, it will make your heart smart, but will never give you anything; only the living God can give you anything. If we were only wise we would turn to the living God and never look in any other direction. The Lord says, "The hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for also the Father seeks such as his worshippers". The full thought of worship here is serving; that answers to what Joshua says, "Serve Jehovah". Service in Scripture does not mean what it has come to mean very largely; it means direct ministry to God, that which ministers to His pleasure. We have come to think of it as doing good to men, preaching and so on — that is one form of service, but not the highest form. The highest form of service is to minister to God.

Now Joshua says, "My heart is fixed". It is like that which underlies Paul's appeal to the elders of Ephesus. He tells them what he had been amongst them, what he had ministered, the character of his life and service. It is as much as to say, 'That is what I am, what are you?' That is a solemn word that should come home to us from our Joshua; our Joshua is Paul. He has led us into the inheritance, and brought us all the wealth of God. Now he says, What will you be?

It is important for us to recognise that all of us who have received the Spirit have some knowledge of God in grace, and He appeals to us according to that knowledge, on the ground of what He is to us. Paul says to the Corinthians, Do ye not know that the Holy Spirit dwells in you? To the Galatians he says, How did you receive the Spirit? They were going astray on the ground of law and works, and he asks them how they received the Spirit. Did they not know that they had received the Spirit from God? He speaks to the Ephesians as a quickened company, who through the great mercy and love of God had been brought to know something of the new man, the one body, access to the Father, being built together as a habitation of God in the Spirit. Now Paul says, "I, the prisoner in the Lord, exhort you therefore to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called". That is, he appeals to them on the ground of what God had done for them, and that is the way God appeals to every one of us, and none of us can get out of it. We all have some knowledge of God's ways in grace, and whatever we know of them becomes the ground of His appeal. There is no getting out of divine appeals; you must respond to a divine appeal if there is anything of God in you. Now this is an appeal to serve Jehovah — we are appealed to in this chapter as those to whom God has been everything, and He appeals to us to serve Him.

Shechem is the place of uncompromising decision in relation to the service of God, which of course had in view the house of God. This chapter would witness to us that whatever God may have done for us, however great the extent of His love and power, the elements of idolatry remain with us and have to be refused. Shechem was where Jacob buried the idols; see Genesis 35: 4.

John in his first epistle gives us the inheritance, but, after speaking of the truth of God and eternal life, he says, "keep yourselves from idols", showing that the elements of idolatry were there. If they were not there we should not have to keep ourselves from it. There are always the elements in the human heart that will rob us of the enjoyment of God, and then we cannot love or serve Him. What extreme folly it is to turn aside from the One who has done everything for us and who has made Himself known in supreme love to us — to turn from such a God as that to another! The Lord says in Psalm 16, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another". *Another* can only multiply sorrow, because all other Gods make demands on those who serve them. God is the only one who makes no demands; He supplies everything and does everything.

Of course things take a more subtle form in Christianity. There is not the gross form, images of stone and blocks of wood, but it is remarkable that in writing to the Galatians Paul tells them they had been worshippers of idols, but now

he says, 'You are doing the same thing in another way; you are turning to another and putting yourselves in bondage'.

We have to watch that we do not allow elements that are natural to us which would obscure our enjoyment of God. That is in principle idolatrous; it is "another". I like the first question and answer in the Scottish catechism — "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him for ever". There is something grand in that: to glorify God, and on the basis of that you are to enjoy Him for ever. If I do not glorify God I cannot serve Him — and if I am not enjoying Him I cannot glorify Him. Satan is bringing in every kind of idolatry at the present time — evolution instead of creation. That is another god, and what will it do for people? Nothing. Then people have all kinds of sacraments, and all kinds of religious observances that never give them affection or standing before God, instead of the one offering which perfects them for ever. The devil would like to occupy man with something of the creature to obscure the thought of God and to hinder the enjoyment of Him. We can test everything by this. Does it bring God in or shut Him out? If it shuts Him out, it is idolatrous. A man may say, I have my business to attend to, but can you carry it out with God? You need Him in the details of your business, and if it shuts Him out it is idolatry. Then a woman has her household duties. Does that shut God out? Every duty requires God to be brought into every detail, and then it is not idolatrous. We need the blessed God who in grace and love is the source of every supply. An idol is a troublesome thing; you have to carry it, to minister to it, and it will never do a single thing for you. The tendency is to hide things. I think among the people of God things begin in a hidden way; they come in surreptitiously and are kept out of sight. If we want to go up to Bethel, they have to be brought to light and buried under the oak in Shechem. That is the place where the idols have to be buried.

There is a beautiful appeal in verse 14: "Now fear Jehovah and serve him in perfectness and in truth". It is the Old Testament version of John 4. When God appeals it is irresistible. I do not see how anyone who knows God can refuse His appeal. I admit there is a great deal of failure with us all, but we cannot refuse God's appeal. We all feel we would like to answer to it and, if we are to answer to it, we must get rid of legal thoughts of serving God. God is not served spiritually in an outward way. The apostle Paul says, "whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son". No doubt Paul served in a very practical and energetic way publicly, but the great thing was that he served with his spirit — that is the kind of service that God values. The man who serves in priestly spirit serves with his spirit in right relation to God.

Thousands of people are giving themselves to devoted service on the line that God requires from them, and they are never quite satisfied that they are answering to God's requirements. That character of service cannot be satisfactory to the heart of God or to themselves; it has an idolatrous character because it obscures the blessed God. The end of Luke's gospel answers to service being taken up. The gospel begins with a dumb priest and ends with a company of priests who were blessing, and praising God.

Joshua says, "As for me and my house, we A serve Jehovah". And the people say, "We will serve Jehovah", even when Joshua takes the other side. The people can speak of all that God has been to them and done for them and they say, "He is our God". Then Joshua says, 'If that is so, you must not forget His government; you must remember what He is in His government; He will punish you if you run to another'. We have to face divine government; we cannot allow divine grace to exclude the thought of divine government. If our ways do not please God, we come under His government; that side is for the conscience. The word 'fear' is not so much used now as in olden times, but we need the fear of God to regulate the conscience and the love of God to regulate the affections. They are like two rails on which the train runs; all spiritual progress runs on these two lines.

The wonderful thing is that all God said to the people was about Himself and what He had done, and that is what the stone heard. Joshua made a covenant; it has reached its full height here. The covenant is, like every thought of God, cumulative. Every time it is mentioned, some element is added; all God's thoughts are cumulative. He brings the thing out, then adds to that another, and another, until He has brought out the complete thought. Here the people are in the land, the inheritance, and a covenant is made with them in the full possession of the inheritance, and the stone is set up as a witness. Joshua does not say that the stone heard what they said, but the stone was a witness because it heard all that Jehovah said. That is, it is a witness to the covenant on the divine side. God loves the thought of the covenant;

He says in Hosea, "I will be a husband to them". Many of us have been brought up with a legal thought of the covenant as if it implied our taking some obligations that we could not carry out. But it all depends on what we are in bondage to. If it is to God, it is perfect liberty. It is the kind of bond the woman comes into when she marries a husband. God loves the covenant idea.

There were seven covenants and every one of the seven originated with God. The natural bond between God and His creature has been broken by sin, and there must be a moral bond to take the place of the natural bond. The

covenant is a moral bond; it connects us with the knowledge of the blessed God in the sovereignty of love. The covenant is a beautiful idea; it is God saying, I want you in a bond with Myself, the strength and virtue of which will be in your knowing Me in your affections in the supremacy of My love. What could be more delightful? It all lies in the fact that we know God; that is realised in the covenant, and it is all set forth in Christ. God tells us in Isaiah that Christ Himself is the covenant.

It is very significant that this book ends with three burials. Joseph is buried, and Joshua, and Eleazar. It is God reminding His people at the very end that none of His thoughts will be effectuated apart from resurrection and a quickened people. He is reminding us at the end that Joshua did not bring the people into rest. If the thoughts of God are to be effectuated, it must be through life and incorruptibility being brought to light, and I have no doubt that Joseph had the faith of that. He realised the "dry bones" condition of Israel and that things could not be put right except in relation to resurrection power and a quickened people. He tells them to bring his bones into the land. God will not rest until He has verified every thought in regard to His people, but it will be verified on the principle of resurrection and quickening. The carrying of Joseph's bones all through the wilderness was the testimony to the people that God would carry through all His thoughts. He has introduced the covenant to His people, but has introduced it in the power of life and incorruptibility in Christ. In the meantime it is realised in our spirits as we have in our souls the power of life and incorruptibility in Christ.

JUDGES 1

Judges 1

The book of Judges corresponds more with the present moment than the book of Joshua. In the latter we see how the land was entered upon and possessed under Joshua, who would represent the leadership of Christ by the Spirit through the apostles, securing the possession of the inheritance by spiritual power; but now the question arises as to what will happen when that extraordinary leadership of spiritual power is no longer present. That is the day we are living in. We have not the apostles now to lead us with the power of Christ, and to secure the inheritance to us. That was not intended to be permanent. Joshua grows old and dies, for he represents the order of things that passes away, and the book opens with what takes place after the death of Joshua.

The introduction of the book of Judges is important. Down to verse 5 of chapter 2 it is a preface which stands by itself, and it would appear that in this opening section of the book God would show us how things can be maintained when we have no longer apostolic authority and leading amongst us. The first principle is that it is still possible to enquire of God. It is a striking feature which is suggested to us at the opening of the book; the children of Israel asked Jehovah saying, "Which of us shall go up against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?" They enquired of Jehovah; that is the first principle of security and of spiritual guidance — the first principle on which the inheritance can be secured. Paul is our Joshua, and in bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders he says, "I commit you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give to you an inheritance among all the sanctified", Acts 20:32. It is a question of being directly cast on God; that is the first principle of security and blessing. In the Spirit of Christ things can be maintained, but it is a spirit of entire dependence. If apostles go, God remains.

The outlook of this chapter is that conflict is all before us. The enquiry is how the conflict is to be carried on. The enemies are all present, and it is a question now of how the war is to be carried on. With no Joshua to lead, they are directly cast on God. That is our position; we are directly cast on God, and that is our great security. It would preserve us from all defection. Before the history of failure is given, great principles are set forth that would preserve from failure; if we stand by them they will stand by us.

The result of that beautiful spirit of dependence in which they enquired is that God is with Judah. Divine principles can only be carried out in dependence. The more correct my principles are, the more I shall fail if I am not in

dependence. There is often a great admixture of self-confidence when a person professes to be so sure of having the Lord's mind. It is often divorced from the spirit of dependence and readiness to be guided and built up by the word of His grace.

They were directly enquiring of God; there is no priest mentioned here. That is our privilege. We cannot do as they did at Corinth; they wrote to the apostle, and had a long letter back, answering their questions authoritatively. We cannot do that; we have no apostles. We are directly cast on God, and I think it is expedient for us that we have not the apostles. The Lord has told us that it was expedient for Him to go away, and I think it is expedient that the apostles went, so that we might be cast on God directly. It is the rock principle, for possession of the inheritance — to be cast on God.

The second great preservative principle is that we recognise the brotherhood. A person might say, I go on with God, but are you going on with your brethren? We must not move without our brethren. While it remains true that we can get everything from God — in an abstract sense everything comes from God, even help from the brethren — but we not only get help from God, but from our brethren.

Judah needed help from Simeon his brother. Simeon had something Judah had not, but what Simeon had was necessary to Judah's success in getting the inheritance. It is a great principle of safety for us to recognise what is in our brother. When the Lord was going away He gave us a preservative commandment. He had been the centre for holding them together by the power of His own love, so when He was going away He said that the essential thing for us is to love one another. He would have us recognise the essentiality of the brotherhood. That is the principle that comes, not only into conflict, but into service. Judah showed his affection for his brother under circumstances that added lustre to it, because he had to give up part of his inheritance to Simeon. He had such a big inheritance; but he is quite unjealous of Simeon, because he calls him in as a brother.

Judah derived pre-eminence from his prince — Caleb. Caleb is the first man in the wilderness who showed that his heart was wholly set on the inheritance. What was before Caleb was the way Jehovah was moving, and Caleb was wholly following Him in it. The presence of Caleb at the head of Judah gave Judah pre-eminence in regard to the acquisition of the inheritance. It is not here so much a question of faith but of love.

Here at the beginning we have these great principles which would safeguard the inheritance dependence on God, and the recognition of the brethren. I *need* my brethren, and then we have the Spirit as maintaining things in

freshness. Historically this incident about Achsah took place before the death of Joshua, and that reminds us that Scripture was written by inspiration. Certain things are put together here morally. If we lose the leadership of the apostles we do not lose God, nor the brotherhood, nor the Spirit of God and what He can do for us; and all these things will enable us to overcome every hostile power. So the inheritance can be fully possessed, even though outwardly it is a day of weakness, and the apostles are gone. It is only through conflict that anything has been maintained; everything connected in any way with the inheritance has been fought for. If we personally have not fought for it, others have had to fight for us.

In the book of Judges God said He would leave some of the enemies in the land so that there would be the necessity for conflict. That applies in principle to the church. God will never suffer the inheritance to be possessed without conflict. If we give up conflict, we give place to the Canaanite. Many of our brethren have secured a good deal of immunity from conflict; they have declined conflict, but they have lost the inheritance. Peace at any price is not the way to get the inheritance.

When we cease to acquire fresh territory, the enemy will soon turn the tables on us. We see in this book how the enemy turned the tables on them. It first began by their not attacking the enemy, and it is not long before the Canaanite insists on dwelling there; he becomes aggressive. If we are not aggressive the enemy will be. But it is not fighting all the time; a time of conflict is followed by a time of rest. The land had rest for so many years. If there is conflict, then there is rest, for God delights to give rest to His people, so that what is acquired by conflict can be enjoyed, not only possessed.

For instance, many years ago, when there was a ministry which sought to call attention to the blessedness of eternal life, that it might not be a mere word to us, but a life of blessedness to be enjoyed, what a battle there was! The question now is, Have we taken possession of what the battle was about? Have we the good now after forty years of what was fought for then?

The seven nations represent the complete power of evil, hostile to the pleasure of God in His people. The enemies are not altogether external — the force of all these powers operates through the flesh. Whatever principle of evil there may be, there is that in my flesh that would join hands with it. I have to realise there is something in me that would be ready to join hands and tolerate any evil.

Everything goes on victoriously down to a certain point. In verse 19 we see the first sign of weakness: "He did not dispossess the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron". It is the first sign of weakness — to be

impressed by the strength and power of what is opposed to you. We ought to be impressed by the sense of the power of God.

Caleb was not in evidence then. He did not fail to take possession of his portion of the inheritance. Caleb is separated from the failure, and singled out as one who did not participate in it. It is good to know that Caleb does not die. Caleb is still alive. If Joshua dies, there is no mention in Scripture about the death of Caleb.

The upper and nether springs come in in connection with Caleb. His daughter, Achsah, represents the subjective state in the people of God that feels the need of the Spirit. She wanted springs of water. There is something positive about that; it is not exactly conflict, but springs of water are given for refreshment, that the land should be fertile; it is on the positive side. We should not be content to say we have the Spirit. As redeemed, and as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the Spirit, but we want springs, the flow of the upper and nether springs, and we shall not be preserved from the failure of the book of Judges if we have not the springs really flowing. The great fruit of the Spirit is eternal life;

it is the demonstration of what the Spirit can do for the saints. Scripture says that eternal life is of the Spirit. "He that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life", Galatians 6:9. Caleb suffers no defeat; he is an overcomer. I trust we are anxious to be overcomers, lest the conflict find us out. If we do not overcome, we shall go under. Caleb never went under, and there is no need for *us* to go under. The Lord had to point out the sad condition of the assemblies in the book of Revelation, and He faithfully pointed out every defect. We shall see all the features of departure in this book of Judges, but He never left one assembly without an overcomer, showing that a state of things will never be permitted that will swamp what is of God.

If I am wrong at one stage I shall not be able to go on to the next. We see here the extraordinary power that there was with the people to deal with an extraordinary power of evil, and they secured things of great importance. Jerusalem was taken, and Hebron secured. It is a great thing to clear away all pretenders and opposers, and to secure a place where the Lord's Name alone is to be honoured. Jerusalem in Scripture is the city of the great King, the place where Jehovah would set His Name. Then Hebron, meaning *Company*, would answer to the truth of fellowship. If we have what is due to the Lord's Name first, then we can have the truth of fellowship.

What one has proved in the past makes one tremble; and conflict is testing, because it is easy to get into a spirit in conflict which is not of God. We see here that what is of the flesh comes down — the pretentiousness of the flesh

even in the region of what is of God. There are things which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. Such a man as Adoni-bezek had seventy kings under his table. He represents the extraordinary ascendancy of the man after the flesh in a sphere which belonged to God, but when he comes to Jerusalem he dies. When what is due to the Lord's Name is recognised, all that kind of thing dies. There was no repentance, but he recognised the justice of his punishment, and all those who come under the government of God will have to own the justice of it. God is not mocked. We need not think anything will fail to produce its appropriate fruit.

I have been thinking of the epistle of John in connection with Judges. John warns us against the inroads of the enemy, who has to be dispossessed, but he shows that we can have anything we want by asking. "Whatsoever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments, and practise the things which are pleasing in his sight", 1 John 3: 22. The Lord says, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it", John 14:14. He does not say, I will give it consideration, but "I will do it". It shows how well we are set up if identified with that Name. Then John dwells on love for the brethren. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren", 1 John 3: 14. It is because we love God that we love the brethren.

The fact that a few saints can walk together without human order is marvellous. We can understand people keeping together with conditions of rule or worldly principles — friends, plenty of amusement, social links, etc. — but for people of different characters and temperaments to keep together in the truth is a great marvel; it is the power of God. No power could keep them together but the power of God.

We have seen that the failure of the church came in after the apostles passed away; here it is after the death of Joshua. Evidently the first sign of weakness is that they could not drive out the enemy, "the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron"; but in the same verse we read that "Jehovah was with Judah". The power of God was there, but they did not take account of it, and I believe that was the first defection in the assembly — failure to take account of the power of God by the Spirit. If Jehovah was with His people, what were chariots of iron! They might as well have been made of tissue paper.

Judah failed to recognise the power of God as present by the Spirit. That was the initial failure of the church. The Spirit was with the people of God, though dishonoured and ignored. In the earliest writings that followed the days of the apostles, we do not find the recognition of the presence and power of the Spirit. It is a great thing to recognise that the power of the chariots of iron is

nothing if God is dwelling in His people by the Spirit. John speaks of it in relation to many antichrists; but then he says, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4:4.

The recognition of the presence of the Spirit would produce suitable conditions. Does not Paul bring it before the Corinthians on that line? He calls them to recognise the presence of the Spirit as the means to bring about definite suitable conditions. How could anyone recognise the presence of the Spirit in himself or in the assembly, without being powerfully affected? To recognise the presence of God, and not be affected, would be impossible. Even an unbeliever falls on his face; what then about a believer?

"The children of Benjamin did not dispossess the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day", verse 21. Jerusalem is the city of the great King, and it is the place where Jehovah sets His Name, and it is the place from which the word of Jehovah went forth. So it represents the rights of Christ. The Jebusites represent those powers of evil which would hinder the rights of Christ from being in exercise. They were the old inhabitants. It is not impossible for anything that has come into christendom to come in with us. We are not exempt or immune from anything. We are as much in danger of ignoring the presence of the Spirit as the early church. We know they did, and we are in the same danger, and the rights of Christ as King, Lord, Head, and Son over God's house, are all set forth in Jerusalem; it is the centre of rule and divine influence. The Spirit is not taken account of now in christendom, and there are influences present which would challenge the rights of Christ. That largely opened the door to evil when it first came in amongst us. The Holy Spirit was only thought of as an influence, and people have prayed that the Spirit may be poured out. He was not only an influence but an absent influence in their thoughts.

Think of the rights of Christ as Lord and Head! Christendom is baptised, but what is baptism if there is no recognition of the rights of Christ? See what John says about commandments; we are apt not to think of them, for the word has a legal sound, but it belongs to Jerusalem. "Commandment" is an important word with John; no writer speaks so much of them. If christendom has departed from them, we have to recognise them as the things that must not be surrendered at any cost. It is love that is in authority; that is why His commandments are not grievous. There is not a single commandment that has not come with the authority of love. The One who commands is the One who died for me. What could be more touching!

The first weakness in the assembly after the death of the apostles was a failing to take account of the power of the Spirit there, and the second, in figure, is that there was a failure to dispossess the influences that stood against the rights of Christ.

Then, in connection with Joseph, *Bethel* comes into view — the house of God. “They went up against Bethel; and Jehovah was with them”, verse 22. It is remarkable that the Spirit of God tells us that Jehovah was with them. It seems to me to accentuate their failure. If Jehovah was with them, why did they want to solicit the help of a citizen, one of the inhabitants of the city? They solicited help from that which they were set to overthrow, and the result was they perpetuated what God was set to destroy. God would have Luz to disappear, and Bethel to be there instead. But the result of their getting help from this source was that another Luz was set up. Would not Jehovah have shown them the way into the city? If we solicit help from the world, we have to repay them. One good turn deserves another. They said, If you show the way we will show you kindness. It was a bargain. This man’s affections were not identified with Bethel, but with Luz; he loved the old place, and calls the new city Luz. It was different from Rahab; Rahab’s heart had been captured. This man’s heart was still in Luz, and he carried it with him; he built a city and called it Luz. He had no affection for the house of God. The soliciting of this man’s help perpetuated “unto this day” what God would have destroyed utterly.

Luz means *bent*, what is not straight. In christendom all the truth of Scripture is *bent* — all twisted and made to suit man, but in the house of God all must be straight. It has typical allusion to the way the truth has been distorted. If the Spirit is not taken account of, influences militate against the rights of Christ; the next thing is that the truth is bent, and made unsuitable for the house of God, which is the pillar and base of the truth. Scripture speaks of cutting in a straight line the word of truth; the truth is never bent. The idea of what is bent is that you go round about to reach God, and nothing like that suits the house of God. Holiness is there, the truth is there, and it is always straight. The Lord says of Himself, “He that is holy, he that is true”. Truth is never twisted; it is always straight.

The next one we read of is Manasseh. “And Manasseh did not dispossess Bethshean and its dependent villages, nor Taanach and its dependent villages, nor the inhabitants of Dor and its dependent villages, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and its dependent villages, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and its dependent villages; and the Canaanites would dwell in that land. And it came to pass when Israel became strong, that they made the Canaanites tributary;

but they did not utterly dispossess them”, verses 27, 28. We seem to go down one step at a time. They “*would dwell*”, suggesting an exercise of will which is allowed to be in the ascendant, the principle of allowing things to be determined by the will of man rather than by the will of the Lord. What man wishes is accepted as contributory. Help is accepted from the world; that which should be destroyed mercilessly is condoned, and allowed to be contributory.

There is a further step in verses 29 and 30 as to Ephraim and Zebulun. It says of each that “the Canaanites dwelt among them and became tributaries”. If we admit the principles of the world, if we tolerate them, they will soon *dwell* with us.

Then in verse 32 the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, and Naphtali dwelt among the Canaanites too. In figure the people of God are seen right down at the level of the world; not only are the principles of the world seen in the people, but they are dwelling in the world; it is the decline and fall of the assembly.

In Dan the inhabitants have the upper hand, and Dan is driven to the hill country. It is the history of the downfall of the assembly. The power of what is contrary to God is able to drive out the people of God. The hill-country has always been available; all through the dark ages when the world had got into the church, and the church into the world, there were those who lived in the hill country. Zacharias and Elizabeth lived there, and many went to visit them there. How beautifully people can talk who live in the hill country!

I think that Luke 1 is one of the most cheering chapters in Scripture. It was at the time when Israel was apostate — everything publicly was in the hands of the enemy, and we find people dwelling in the hill-country, their hearts full of divine actings, and in lowly dependence. These humble people unknown in the religious world, or regarded with contempt if they had been known, have the light of God with them in the hill-country. What God looks for is a poor and afflicted people. Bochim represents the right spirit in a day when the Christian profession has utterly failed.

I am not suggesting that Dan should have yielded to the enemy as he did, but simply to indicate that, however great the power of the enemy may be, he will always have to leave the hill country to the people of God. In a day of decline there will always be a hill country. The church histories men have written are the public history; what I want to know, and am expecting to read by and by in the world to come, is God’s church history of the spiritual work carried on in saints, of His own blessed and personal work in the face of all the hostile power of the world, the flesh and the devil; how he kept them in the hill

country even in the darkest days, when the power of the enemy was at its highest.

JUDGES 2

Judges 2

Our attention is called in chapter 1 to the increasing weakness of the people, how they gradually surrendered more and more to the enemy. I suppose that the opening of this chapter gives the secret of it all.

The whole secret was that they had failed to go to Gilgal. Gilgal was the place where the angel of Jehovah was; divine power was there. I do not think we are told previously that the angel of Jehovah was there. The people had not been back to Gilgal since the time of Joshua, and that was the secret of their weakness. There had been victories, but victories that retained elements of weakness. Gilgal was the place of circumcision, the place where all connected with ourselves is cut off in unsparing self-judgment; that is the place of power and the angel of Jehovah is there.

The circumcision of the Christ is what one may call the great circumcision; that is, the flesh has been absolutely cut off in the death of Christ, but then we have to come to it as privilege and power, and, having come to it once, we have to recur to it. It is obvious that the lack of going back to Gilgal was the secret of all their weakness. God brings us back to it in experimental judgment of all connected with ourselves. In the early part of Joshua, we see that Joshua and all the people come to the camp in Gilgal. The twelve stones taken out of Jordan were there. Nothing is to remain, but what came out of death with Christ. Nothing that went into the death of Christ will do for God. It is what came out of that death that is serviceable to God, and that involves the cutting off of the whole body of the flesh. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ"; it was experimental with him. If there is anything about me unsuitable to God's resurrection world, it has to be cut off in self-judgment if I am to be in spiritual power. Self-judgment is the opposite to self-occupation. Self-occupation must be that I am either occupied with good self or bad self, but if I come to the cutting off of the flesh in the death of Christ and judge myself in the light of that, good and bad flesh is gone. God will not support the flesh. The constant judgment of what is connected with self has to be maintained; otherwise there is no power.

Weeping in itself is weakness and not power, but it shows some remains of right feeling. When departure begins we do not lose all right feeling at once. When Jehovah said He would not drive out the inhabitants, there was pious feeling — they wept, and they had some sense of what was due to Jehovah; they sacrificed there, but it was Bochim, not Gilgal. It was a change in the ways of God.

The very presence of these things, which came in as the result of the government of God, is a test. They were left as a test, so, if there were any overcoming spirit in Israel it was brought to light; it was proved whether the people would walk in obedience to Jehovah's commandments. In the same way, anything that came in in the Christian profession, and from which we suffer, comes in as a test whether we can walk in obedience. There must be sects, so that the approved may be manifested.

A great deal of the trouble which we have amongst ourselves is because we do not feel with God the state of the public church. The public position is in view here — the public history of the people of God; the secret of power has been departed from, and God does not promise restoration of it. We know from our church history — Revelation 2 and 3 — how things go from bad to worse, but there are overcomers. There is, in the faithfulness of God, recovery. Here God raises up judges. God sees how His people are spoiled and damaged, and He raises up judges who can deliver His people from the causes of defeat. God looks down and sees His people not enjoying their inheritance; they are oppressed and afflicted.

Are we enjoying ours? If we think of the church as the people of God we shall see it was brought by apostolic leading into all that was the mind of God for them. In the epistle to the Ephesians Paul brings the people into all the mind of God for them, but he finishes by saying, You must fight for it. It is a testing time, and to fight we must have power. If we get away from the truth of Colossians, i.e., circumcision, we shall not be of much use in Ephesian warfare. Ephesian armour is *moral* state: "girt about with truth ... the breast-plate of righteousness ... the helmet of salvation ... the shield of faith ... feet shod with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace". All these things involve state, and we cannot have the state without the deepest self-judgment. There is no place but Gilgal where we can put on the armour.

Bochim is the public position here. There is no longer the power of God publicly with His people; they are left face to face with enemies whom they are not able to dispossess. They still sacrificed to Jehovah; they were not actually in idolatry, but the power is lost. They had not yet lost all spiritual feeling, or sense of what was due to the Lord.

In these conditions God intervenes in raising up judges, and His power is there with the judge. All through the history of the church God has raised up judges, saviours, and given them power to deliver His people from what hinders them at that particular moment. God has always supported His servants, and those who listened got the gain of it. What deliverance God gives is for the whole church, though only a few may get the good of it.

Power is always found in connection with self-judgment. If self-judged we make much of Christ, and then there is spiritual power seen in the greatest outward weakness. As long as the judges lived there was deliverance. But the people would not listen, even when God raised up judges, and chapter 2 shows how positive idolatry came in. As long as the generation of Joshua lived, they had the knowledge of Jehovah, but then another generation came in, and it is said solemnly of them that they did not know Jehovah or His works. It is very serious, after all the provision God had made for things being passed on to the next generation in the land. It would seem to intimate some failure on the part of the first generation.

The first generation was marked by spiritual weakness in getting away from Gilgal. Then there must be a personal history with God; parents cannot pass faith on to their children. Our parents may have us baptised and instruct us in the truth, but they cannot pass faith on. We have to take that up for ourselves. Paul speaks of unfeigned faith in Timothy's mother and grandmother, but he says, it is "*in thee also*". I have to take it up for myself. Otherwise you would find people coming into the place of privilege in a hereditary way, without soul history, and they do not know God. These people forsook Jehovah because they did not know Him or His works. Very soon in the church there were a great many who were externally in church privilege with no soul history, and that opened the way for idolatry. We have all to take up the exercise as to our personal faith. I may hear what my father could tell me, and I may come into the place of privilege which my father enjoyed, and yet have no soul history. There were people with no experimental knowledge of the bondage of Egypt, of redemption, of the Red Sea, of Jordan, of the brazen serpent. They did not know Jehovah, and yet there they were in the land. The presence of such people opened the way for idolatry. It raises the question with us, How far have we been influenced and carried by those gone before? Many of us have come into things easily; they were ready made for us. The question is, Have we faith for it? What have we received directly and personally from God?

Ministry, if worth anything, produces personal exercises, and that leads to faith and soul history. The book of Judges represents the public position, the church committed to the responsibility of the whole truth of God. The church was introduced by the apostles into the whole privilege of Christianity. Has it been enjoyed? Has God been glorified? After having such privileges and light, is it true that we are serving Baal? It says, "They served Baal and the Ashtoreths". Baal has reference to the energies of service and Ashtoreth represents what corrupts the affections. If a soul has a history with God he wants to serve God; he wants his energies to be spent in the service of God, and he wants to

enjoy the land. An idol is a master; Baal means *master* or *possessor*. The question is, Who is my master? Who possesses me? It is easy to be possessed by the desire to make money. A man who is devoting his energies to making money is a worshipper of Baal; he is serving Baal. This book shows us how easy it is to come under idolatrous influence. It is very solemn that Paul should say to the Corinthians, those in the assembly participating in privileges outwardly: "Some have not the knowledge of God; I speak to your shame". They had fallen under the power of the enemy. If we walk in self-judgment we shall not fall under any influence which is adverse to God, but, if we do not judge ourselves, we shall. We all have to learn to refuse the things that appeal to us. The devil tempts me with something I like; I suffer if I refuse it, but I cease from sin, and God is preserved before my soul — that is the blessing of walking in piety. The Christian begins the day by praying to be preserved from the influences of the world and of the flesh. He wants his energies to be for the service of God, and his affections for Christ, and then we do not fall under the enemies who oppress and crush the people of God so that they are deprived of all pleasure in the enjoyment of the land. What a grief to God to look down and see His people occupied with things that stand in no relation to God or to His service, things for the glorification of self, which minister to the thoughts of the flesh! God sees His people spending themselves in that way, and it grieves Him. It means that they have no joy.

Caleb went to Gilgal to claim his inheritance (see Joshua 14: 6) and he received it, and was blessed. Caleb was a man of power. This is a divine picture of how the people of God have been robbed of their inheritance by not maintaining circumcision — self-judgment, and the enemy has appealed to them in various ways, and turned them into idolaters. The enjoyment of the land has been lost, and, instead of overflowing with joy, feeding on fat things and drinking wine on the lees well refined, they are filled with the worthless things of this world. *God feels it*. If I have not been enjoying the inheritance today, God is grieved.

JUDGES 3

Judges 3

The unfaithfulness of the people was the original cause of their enemies being left. But we find here that Jehovah left them, and that He had a purpose in leaving them. Everything contrary to the truth that has had a place in connection with the people of God must have come in first through unwatchfulness, and want of zeal for God, but then God had a purpose in leaving it there.

It is suggestive that a generation arose that did not know Jehovah. There is a certain responsibility with us concerning the next generation. Paul was very concerned about the next generation, that there were not very many on whom he could rely, and we could not say it was from lack of parental care. He was a true father and mother, but there were not many of whom he could say that they were his true children in the faith. Timothy was one. There is an exercise as to the generation following, whether they are prepared to take up the faith of the parents. Our parents are not able to give us faith; we have to take it up for ourselves. They can bring us into the place of Christian privilege and instruct us, and pass on as teaching all they know, but they cannot give us faith. It is for us to take up what our fathers have left. It is an exercise for those of us getting old as to what kind of generation we leave behind; we should be delighted to see them with more definite purpose and faith than we have. It delights us to see a young brother or sister with more definiteness of heart to follow the Lord than we have. It humbles us about ourselves, but delights us to see it. If the Lord tarries, there will be another generation, and it is a serious matter that it should be a spiritual generation. Many times God has intervened, even in the history of the church, and there has been a remarkable movement of revival, but departure has come as soon as the vessel was removed. We see it all through Judges; deliverance comes in, but, as soon as the vessel of divine power dies, the spiritual movement ceases.

Things are left; it has not pleased the Lord to come in to remove all kinds of evils that have come in. He has left them there as a test, and the enemy is always on the ground; therefore conflict must go on to the end if things are to be maintained for God. There never will be a complete clearance of the enemy; he will not be cleared off the scene until the church is gone. When it is a question of dispossessing the enemy, we have all to learn war. We have to learn it. The battles fought by our predecessors do not deliver us; we have all to take up conflict. If we do not take up conflict we shall fall under the power of something evil.

We see in verse 6 that they took up unequal yokes. The principle of separation from evil is fundamental, and nothing is maintained for God except on that principle. Here we find that the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites; that is that they formed these links. People form these links because their parents are dwelling in the world, and the very thought of separation is given up; that opens the door. If there is not an inward spirit of separation, it opens the door for unholy links and associations. No temptation to take up an unequal yoke, or to give up separation, begins outwardly; it begins *inwardly*.

In verse 4 we read, "They were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of Jehovah, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses". The commandment is a test of how we stand in relation to the Lord and His will. "If ye love me, keep my commandments". If His commandments do not rule my affections, I have departed from Him inwardly. I may be walking perfectly before the brethren, but I am away inwardly and, if I am not restored, I shall eventually give up separation in some outward way.

The first departure was a giving up of the truth of the calling. In figure they were partakers of the heavenly calling, and the first departure was giving it up; they dwelt among the Canaanites. That is why Chushan-rishathaim comes up and gets power. He was king of the very country out of which God called Abraham, and if we give up in heart the heavenly calling, we shall fall under the influence of the place out of which we are called. Idolatry was there. What exposed the people to this was that they had idolatry among themselves; in verse 6 we read that they intermarried with the nations and served other gods. It makes one very anxious about the state of one's inward affections. If they are not kept for the Lord, it is only a question of time before we get away publicly.

Here it was eight years before they realised the true position. They came under an alien influence for eight years. Saints may miss a great deal, and be a long time before they realise it, but when they do they cry to the Lord. Satan presents bondage as liberty; he says, You please yourself, do what you like; and he makes it appear as if it was liberty, and people often take long to realise that the line they are on is robbing them of the enjoyment of the land. When they do wake up, they cry to the Lord, and He raises up a saviour. There never was a saint who cried to the Lord about things that hinder from enjoying the inheritance, but that God raised up a saviour for them.

It would not be like God to leave us under bondage when we want to be free from it. If the people of God woke up to the fact that they were not enjoying the inheritance, and truly desired to, they would get deliverance from every

enemy, whether Moabite, Canaanite or Philistine. We never have the same battles again; always some new, fresh phase has to be met, but in every case there is a deliverer. "And the children of Israel cried to Jehovah; and Jehovah raised up a saviour to the children of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother". What an exercise he had to see the state of things, and yet it went on eight years before God could use him! God waits on the exercises of His people. You say, Why does not the Lord deliver His people from all the corruptions of christendom? Why do not they separate from it? He waits on their exercises; He waits for them to cry to Him for deliverance.

Othniel means *Powerful man of God*. A man of God would stand for God, and I believe he is the first man in Scripture of whom it was said that the Spirit of Jehovah was upon him. It is the Spirit of the Lord raising up a standard among the people. Othniel came of a good stock; he was a near relation to Caleb — he had taken Kirjath-sepher, the city of books; that is, the wisdom of the world. Kirjath-sepher becomes Debir — *speaking*, he is ready to listen to divine speaking. Othniel represents the kind of man God can raise up, and he has a good wife; his affections were rightly placed. He married Achsah, not a daughter of the land, but one thoroughly set for the south land, and for springs of water as well. A man like that was morally qualified to be a saviour.

Othniel was a disciplined man; he had to wait eight years. All the servants of God have to learn to wait for the exercises of the people of God. What a discipline to see the people of God suffering from unbelief, and to have to walk with them in their afflictions! Caleb had to wait forty years. Nothing tests us like patience; it is one of the greatest features we can possess. Caleb was a man who could wait forty years for the land.

What is the value of my having light if I cannot carry the brethren? I have not only to be true to the light, but to wait on the exercises of the brethren, and carry them. We cannot carry anything in an arbitrary way. These men felt the oppression, and when the time came they were available, and the result of their intervention was that the land had rest. We are not fighting all the time; God gives periods of rest. For the time being the enemy is held in check, according to the energy of faith and the state of the people. God waits for the exercises of His people, and those who have faith have to wait too. Those whom the Lord raised up as deliverers had the mind of the Lord for the moment. In the history of the church, when there was a readiness and exercise for it, God has raised up one and given spiritual light and leading, and has always been with that man whom He has raised up. If God has raised up a

man, He will stand by him to the end, and never let him drop. If a man *sets up* to be a leader, or if people set him up, he will have a disastrous end.

The next oppressor was Moab. Moab was a people kindred with Israel; they were the children of Lot, and they represent the influence of what is natural. Lot had a wonderful opportunity, and he was what we call a true believer — the Spirit of God called him a righteous man — but he was influenced by what is natural. It says of Eglon that he was very fat. Moab represents a condition of things easily nourished, and that can soon acquire great proportions. Nothing is easier than to nourish what is natural until it becomes fat, but there is no liberty until the fat man is killed. There is no liberty for enjoyment of the land if we are under the influence of the Moabite. It represents the natural element that can work in the true believer. Lot was influenced by the natural to choose the well-watered plain, and that led him to Sodom. We are all in danger of that. I suppose nothing hinders the people of God more than their friends, acquaintances and relations. They keep on with what is natural. It is much easier to go on with people with whom you are in contact, and go on in a friendly way, than to take a definite stand for God. That is the influence, the oppression of the Moabite.

God raised up Ehud, a left-handed man, as deliverer from the Moabites. God takes up men that have apparently a good deal that hampers them. This book brings out the odd character of people that God can use. He uses unusual instruments, such as a left hand. Shamgar had an ox-goad — an uncomely weapon, but effective. Samson had a jaw-bone of an ass. God uses things one would not expect. The power is within, not with the instrument. Ehud knew what was needed at that time. The people were on wrong lines; they sent a present, showing the servile condition they were in — like people keeping up friendly links with those who are not the people of God. Ehud knew what was needed; he was not on the line of presents, but of a short sword. He knew the fat man must be killed, and he killed him. We have to kill the Moabite in ourselves. When he has killed him, he blows a trumpet, and gives a spiritual lead, and others are prepared to follow. That is the principle of leading among the people of God. Are we ready to follow when the trumpet sounds? They were ready to go, and they followed and killed ten thousand men, all fat men.

Many are exercised today, but they are held by friendly links, so they are not prepared to use the two-edged sword. We need to use the sword, so as not to allow ourselves to be robbed of the enjoyment of the inheritance by our acquaintances, or our relatives, or anything on the line of the natural.

JUDGES 4

Judges 4

There are very interesting features from a spiritual point of view in this chapter and the next. We see quite new unfoldings and modes of divine activity. We have always to be prepared for that; God does not repeat Himself. This time it is the king of Canaan who oppresses the people. We have had Mesopotamia, Moab, and the Philistine; now it is Canaan.

Canaan means *low-land*; another interpretation is *trader*. It seems to suggest the minding of earthly things, seeking one's own interests; that is a terrible oppression to fall under. To be minding earthly things and seeking our own things is a coming down altogether from the elevation proper to the calling of God, and it is a formidable power. Sisera had nine hundred chariots of iron. There is no greater snare or scourge among the people of God than that.

God meets this condition by the introduction of a new element — He introduces a prophetess. We see now prophetic light breaking in, and, if God gives prophetic light, it has a very far-reaching bearing. The song of Deborah goes right on to the finish of all fighting; it looks on to a time when all the enemies of Jehovah perish and when the way each has behaved in conflict can be reviewed. Some have been valiant, some slack and careless. The next chapter is like the judgment-seat. When prophetic light comes in, it always involves the finish of God's ways — God having the last word. The idea of prophecy is God having the last word, evil and good being consigned to their places. We are in conflict today, with prophetic light that the way we behave is going to be reviewed. God will take account of all we do while the battle is going on.

Sisera represents the leader of the world power that is opposed to the pleasure of God in His people. All that power is going to be overthrown, but the battle is going on, and each one of us has a responsibility, and the question is, How are we behaving ourselves in the battle? Are we maintaining our heavenly character, our associations, and our spirits in the light of the prophetic word? Then we have Deborah. A woman in Scripture presents state, and we see in Deborah a state characterised and governed by the mind of God. She is an overcomer, because she dwelt under her palm tree, which means victory. She lived between Ramah and Bethel, the *high places* and the *house of God*. Ramah answers to Ephesians, and Bethel, the house of God, is the place on earth where we have access to what is heavenly — the gate of heaven.

If we accept the prophetic word, and are found in a state which is governed by the prophetic word, we shall be in superiority to the Canaanites. Canaan lives on low ground, and the conflict is always between low ground and high ground. We might be taken up with religious things on earth. Paul speaks of many who mind earthly things in contrast to those who have their citizenship in heaven. The Canaanite typifies those who mind earthly things, seeking their own advantage. Paul speaks, too, in the end of Romans, of those who cause division, and says a hard thing of them: "such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly". There is some selfish object which governs them. If they were governed by the Lord Jesus Christ, they would never cause division among the brethren. If my god is my belly, I am on a very low ground — and Canaan is low ground. If people fall under that, it is a scourge.

The Spirit of God says that Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth, suggesting that she recognised headship. Any vessel raised up of God would recognise divine order. God could not raise up a prophetess to traverse His own order. If the Lord gives prominence to a woman, she will be prominent in a way suitable to the position, and will recognise headship.

There is such a thing as being governed by the influences of heaven. It is said, "From heaven was the fight"; that is a very remarkable word in the next chapter. If the fight is from heaven, everything connected with it must be of a heavenly character. "The stars from their courses fought with Sisera". We must be governed by divine principles, and be in the power of what is heavenly, and live where Deborah lived. The mother is greater than the soldier. That is an important principle — the "mother in Israel" and leadership amongst the people of God is dependent on that. There was no leadership until Deborah arose, a "mother in Israel". We see in Deborah a state governed by the mind of God, and maternal qualities along with it, signifying that she is able to foster and cherish that kind of thing in Israel. The mother is greater than the soldier; state is more important than action. It would not have been suitable for her to lead the battle, and she keeps her place.

Jerusalem above is our mother, and there is power to overcome the Canaanitish influence. The things of earth are morally base and low, but if we have a mother shedding the influences of heaven on our spirits, what an impulse it gives!

The next chapter is like the judgment seat of Christ. When all is over, the question is, How did you behave? Did you come back like Zebulun? Or hang back like Meroz? The next chapter is a grand review. The prophetic word carries to the finish of God's ways. If you learn the spiritual state represented in Deborah, the state governed by the mind of God, there is room for God to

move by whom He will. He selects Barak and Naphtali and Zebulon as the kind of instruments He will use. If we want to be delivered from what is of earth, we must be prepared for deliverance in God's way. We have to recognise sovereignty. Barak is mentioned, because he is the one who led Israel to victory. It was weakness on his part that he would not go without Deborah, and so he lost some of the honour. The word of Jehovah should have been enough. There was an element of weakness, along with his faith which is mentioned in Hebrews. He lost some of his glory, some of the honour God would have put on him. Often in the battles of Jehovah we are made conscious of our weakness, and it is a very happy thing if we do not exhibit it publicly. If I was rightly exercised about my weakness, I should have a deep sense of it before God in secret, but should not exhibit it publicly.

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual, not carnal. God uses His own instruments, weak in the eyes of men, but strong to the pulling down of strongholds. This book is remarkable for that; an ox-goad, a tent-pin, a jawbone of an ass, show that God is pleased to use things that man would think of no adequacy at all, but would seem ridiculous and unsuitable. God can use anything and make anything effectual, if faithfulness is behind it. The iron chariots show the formidable character and strength of what is on a low level — Canaanitish. You find that Barak is told to go to Mount Tabor, and he goes to Kedesh. That is, there is the thought of elevation in connection with the position. Tabor means *mountain height* and Kedesh means *holy*. That is the position to take up. If we get there, the hostile power only comes up to be destroyed. Ten thousand men are not much before a great army, but Jehovah went out before them, and the army of Sisera fell. "Not *one* was left". In verse 24 we read: "The hand of the children of Israel ever advanced, and prevailed against Jabin, king of Canaan, until they had cut off Jabin, king of Canaan". It looks on prophetically to the complete destruction of every power hostile to the thoughts of Jehovah for His people. If we get a prophetic word from God and have the state governed by it, we are well assured of God's ultimate victory. It is most important that there should be this state in correspondence with the prophetic word. That is the importance of God giving a prophetess, emphasising the importance of state. The vessel is to be in a state corresponding with the light that is from God, and there is no getting over a spiritual state governed by God.

Then there is this remarkable incident of Jael at the end of the chapter. Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, and her husband had made a move of separation. They had separated from those mentioned in chapter 1, verse 16, who "had gone up out of the city of palm-trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad, and they went and dwelt

with the people". There seems to have been an exercise to be in definite separation. So Heber leaves those mixed up with the people, and takes a more definite place of separation, and is a tent-dweller. There was a spiritual history behind Jael's act. There was a measure of separation; still, there is peace between Heber and Sisera. There is another link to be separated; Jael had another step to take. Souls often move in a measure of separation, and sometimes they settle down, and stop and think they have come into separation, and perhaps there are some other links; they are going on in a peaceful and friendly way with something hostile to God. Jael took up this exercise; the point came when she felt nothing would do but uncompromising fidelity to Jehovah. There must be unsparing destruction of anything hostile to Jehovah. Sisera was an enemy to Jehovah, and so he must be killed. Jael represents the unsparing faithfulness to God that even a woman can be characterised by in her own sphere. "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed among women *in the tent!*" She is in the tent; she acts in fidelity. The elder, John, writes to the elect lady, and admonishes her to be faithful in the tent. She is not even to give a man a salutation if he is not bringing the doctrine of Christ. There is to be no compromise. Sisera represented to Jael the whole power hostile to the people of God, and she acts towards him with unsparing decision. One might think that it was not a womanly act but it is an act God recognised as one which caused her to be blessed among women.

Jael pierced Sisera's temples, suggesting the destruction of the whole mind of man. We have to destroy it in ourselves; Sisera is in ourselves. There is the constant presence of the power that would lead us to take low ground, causing us to serve ourselves, our own bellies. If we get to bottom, it is self, and that has to be killed; drive the tent-pin into that and kill it. It would typify every act of faithfulness done by a sister; for example, a man comes to the door who does not bring the doctrine of Christ, and she will not let him in or say good-morning; thus she secures victory for all the people of God. It is possible for a sister to destroy morally within her own sphere all that will be destroyed from the presence of the Lord when He comes. She can destroy every influence, every power that will be destroyed at the coming of the Lord.

JUDGES 5

Judges 5

We could not suppose that such a lovely song as this would be given to us by the inspiration of the Spirit of God without there being important instruction for us in it. It is a song that we need to understand in a special way at the present time. This song is praise to God in a different way from the song of Moses, who celebrated the great actings of God in redemption,

and the fruit of those actings. I trust we have all learned to sing the song of Moses, but in the last days we have to learn to sing the song of Deborah and Barak. I suppose one would hardly be a Christian at all if one could not sing with Moses, but it is only overcomers who can sing with Deborah and Barak. The song of Moses is the common property of all: it is the song of the redeemed; but the song of Deborah and Barak is a song sang in difficult times, a song which celebrates how God comes in for His people, and how He provides what is needed for their deliverance in a very dark day. One is as important as the other.

This is the only song in Judges, and therefore it is of great importance. This particular victory over the king of Canaan is taken up by the Spirit of God as an occasion in which to point out how God would deliver His people at all times right on to the time when the wicked will perish and the righteous shine forth in the kingdom. It is a song celebrating God's resource in a difficult day. When God intervenes to deliver His people, everyone is tested; that is how we are tested today by the way God comes in to deliver His people from oppression. We are tested as to whether we identify ourselves wholeheartedly with the deliverer or not. If God has brought in a deliverer, my place in the kingdom will depend on whether I identify myself with the deliverer, and am prepared to take my part in the conflict as a good soldier, or whether I evade it. If the latter, I might possibly come under the curse.

All utterances in Scripture have something distinctive. In this song God raises up leaders for His people. It is the celebration of divine leadership. "For that leaders led in Israel, For that the people willingly offered themselves, Bless Jehovah", verse 2. The state of Israel is sorrowful as described in verse 7: "The leaders ceased in Israel, Ceased until that I Deborah arose, That I arose a mother in Israel". There was no one in Israel to give a spiritual lead, and it has been like that among the people of God many times.

Verse 12 refers to the mother and leader. The mother is represented in Deborah who brings leadership into evidence, those who can cherish the Israel

of God with maternal affection — that is the element that produces leadership. When God raises up leadership He does it in connection with the yearnings of the mother. You must have the mother before the soldier. Before the Lord raised up such distinct leadership as in the beginning of this century, there was the spirit of yearning and maternal affection for the people of God, and God answered it by raising up a spiritual leadership to deliver from all that hinders their enjoyment of the inheritance.

The principle of leadership was first established in the Lord Himself. The Lord is the great Leader, and it is only as persons follow Him that they are competent to lead His people. The Lord never departed from, or shunned the highway; He never went by crooked paths, and He alone is entitled to say "*Follow me*". The apostles never tell us to follow them. Paul said, "Imitate me", but the Lord was the only One to say, "*Follow me*".

There is a way through this world, and the Lord went in that way, and He was the great Leader. He went to His own and He said, "I have overcome the world". His last presentation of Himself to the assembly is as the Overcomer; "even as I also have overcome", Revelation 3: 21. He is the One to follow. All leadership is found in those that follow Him. All others are patterns, never objects; the Lord alone is the Object.

There is another thing of importance, that is, that if the Lord provides a leader, or leaders, in His goodness for His people, He always provides followers, those that follow the Lord, those that offer themselves willingly. That is the great subject of the song — leaders, and those who offered themselves willingly to be identified in the conflict with the leaders. Meroz did not identify itself, and was cursed. There is a special application. If we are not prepared for conflict it is not much use to read Joshua or Judges; they are books for soldiers, for warriors. If we do not take part in the conflict, we shall not get the spoil. Nothing has been gained in the church of God since the days of the apostles, save through conflict, and God has continually aroused exercises in His people by raising up leaders. It is of no use to say we have no leaders; that challenges the faithfulness of God. How could God tell me to obey my leaders if there are not any! This has been the history of things in the church. There has been a great departure, and God has raised up a spiritual leadership in one or more, and all the overcomers have identified themselves with the leaders. The test of an overcomer is to be able to perceive when God is giving a lead, and to identify himself as a soldier with the spiritual movement of the moment.

Overcomers were the product of Deborah's ministry. God raised up a prophetic ministry — a prophetess. She carried on the ministry for twenty years. She

was an overcomer, for she dwelt under a palm-tree. The result of prophetic ministry is a generation of overcomers. All those who offered themselves willingly are begotten of the prophetic ministry of the moment. An overcomer is begotten by the mind of God made known at a particular moment.

Reuben had great searchings of heart. He was tossed up and down, and ended in doing nothing. He represents a man who goes through a tremendous amount of exercise as to conflict, and great deliberations and debates, but it ends in his stopping where he was. If he did not come to share in the battle, what is the use of his exercise? One has known people going through seas of exercise which end in their standing in neutrality, and there is no such thing in the wars of God. Neutrality is the base expedient of modern times.

From verse 14 we have a list of those who came up to identify themselves with the leadership of the moment to give their support: Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh (Machir was his son), Zebulon, Issachar, they all came up to help; and then there are those who did not come. It is like a grand review, like the judgment-seat of Christ. Now the battle is over, and the conduct of everyone is being reviewed. These tribes came up to help, and are mentioned with approval. Two tribes in particular get special commendation: Zebulon and Naphtali jeopardized their lives to death in the high places of the field, verse 18. We ought to covet that in every conflict. We all have to face some kind of conflict, and if we identify ourselves with the spiritual leadership of the moment, we may do it as an ordinary soldier, or in an extraordinary way like men who earn the Victoria Cross. The difference is mentioned.

But then there are those who did not come at all. Reuben had resolves of heart, many good resolutions; He goes through great deliberations, but he abides in the sheepfolds. "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleating of the flocks? In the divisions of Reuben there were great deliberations of heart", verse 16. Sleepless nights are of no use, if they do not bring you into conflict. The Spirit of God in Deborah and Barak asks the question, Why did not you come? With all your deliberations and resolves you never came; you abode in the sheep-folds. People say sometimes, We will not meddle with conflict; we preach the gospel; we look after the sheep. It is good to look after the sheep, but, if a war is on, that is the important thing at the time.

"Gilead abode beyond Jordan". That covers Reuben, Gad and part of Manasseh; they abode beyond Jordan. That represents people who have not taken heavenly ground; they have no interest in heavenly conflict, and do not care anything about it; they stay beyond Jordan. Another is Dan, "And Dan, why did he remain in ships?" Dan remained in ships. I believe ships in

Scripture represent the commerce of the world. Here is a man who is engrossed in money-making, and he has no time to take up conflict; he remains in his ships. "Asher sat on the sea-shore and abode in his creeks", he just takes things comfortably. None of those tribes comes up, and they miss the spoil. If we do not come up we do not get the spoil of conflict. If I am in spiritual conflict I have no pleasure in fighting; that is not the end in view. The end in view is to gain something for oneself, something for Israel, and something for the Lord. Verses 10 and 11 show the gain: "Ye that ride on white she-asses, ye that sit on carpets, and ye that walk by the way, consider. Because of the voice of those who divide the spoil, in the midst of the places of drawing water. There they rehearse the righteous acts of Jehovah, His righteous acts toward his leaders in Israel". They got some of the spoils of the conflict. Paul says, "All who are in Asia have turned away from me", and, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present age"; he had gone down to ships. As time went on there were those who did not stand by Paul; they wanted easy times. They turned away from him and forsook him, but he gives honourable mention to some who did stand by him.

We must recognise spiritual leadership at any particular moment. If any are exercised and cry to God, God raises up a leader; that is the lesson of Judges. It is a picture of what went on in the church from the first days until now. When they felt they were in a state of departure and that the world was getting the upper hand, they cried to God, and God raised up a spiritual leader. There is a spiritual leading now, but it is not what it was at the time of the Reformation. God raised up Luther and others for spiritual leading in that day, and all overcomers identified themselves with it, but there is a spiritual lead *today* as certainly as then. When there is a falling off,

God intervenes again, with *another* form of leadership against the enemy. He does not always work on the same lines. The enemies today are not the same as those the saints had to deal with five hundred years ago. They are the same at the bottom, but methods are different, and we can only meet enemies today as we follow the spiritual leading of today, and identify ourselves with it. If we do not come up, we may get the curse. Meroz gets a bitter curse because he did not come up.

Then the attitude of Meroz seems to be set over against the extraordinary faithfulness of Jael. If one gets a curse, another gets a great commendation. Jael was a woman, and not of Israel. She might seem to be out of it, but her energy of faith brought her into it, and she acted in an extraordinary way against the great enemy of God's people, and destroyed the enemy's great general.

Jael established her right by this act of faith. She severed her old link in a moment. She is something like Rahab. There was a time in the history of Rahab when she severed her relations with her own tribe, with Jericho, its king and people. She formed new links with the people of God, and got a distinguished place in Israel. Jael had been identified with the king of Canaan; there was a covenant between them, but the time came when she recognised that Jabin was hostile to the people of God, and she broke her covenant of peace, and cut herself off from her old confederates, and identified herself with the people of God. She established her right to a place in Israel; she broke her league with Jabin.

The song finishes, "So let all thine enemies perish, Jehovah! But let them that love him be as the rising of the sun in its might". The destruction of Sisera was a kind of foreshadowing of the destruction of all the enemies of God, and everything hostile to the power of His people. All will be destroyed, and the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

JUDGES 6

Judges 6

The enemy in this chapter is Midian, a kindred people according to nature. Nothing impoverishes more than the influence of people with whom we have something naturally in common, so that one's own relatives may be a greater snare than any others. They "destroyed the produce of the land"

and "Israel was greatly impoverished". A person with whom I have tastes in common is a great danger, much more so than one with whom I have nothing in common. The object of the enemy was to deprive the people of the produce of the land. It is serious for us to lose the produce of the land. We live on that, and if we do not, we are spiritually impoverished; some Midianitish influence is robbing us. How much are we enjoying the "things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him", 1 Corinthians 2:9. That is the land, and the enemy would seek to bring us under natural influences so that we may be impoverished.

When they cried to Jehovah He sent a prophet to bring home to them that they had been disobedient. There is always the word to convict before restoration or before God intervenes to deliver. God begins with an exercised man, threshing wheat in the winepress. He is seeking to secure something of the produce of the land. The Angel tells him that Jehovah is with him, and his answer showed that he had a true sense of the position as under the governmental dealings of God. That was his might. His reply was, "Ah, Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold my thousand is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house". What strikes one in Gideon is his concern to be assured that it is Jehovah, and of his own personal acceptance. It is a peace-offering for acceptance (see Leviticus 19:5). He was personally clear of what was evil and idolatrous; he had typically a true estimate of himself and of Christ. There was that which could be wholly accepted, and he was in accord with it.

Before the works of deliverance are wrought, the personal state of the deliverer must be adjusted with God. Gideon takes up relations with God on his own side; then Jehovah enlarges his testimony. He gives him an enlarged apprehension of Christ as the bullock of burnt-offering. This is for his father's house and for the city. The true ground of Israel's blessing was to be publicly set forth "in the ordered manner". It is "the second bullock", intimating the breakdown of all connected with the first order. It is Christ in energy and maturity displacing all that is idolatrous.

Gideon is more personally interesting than any of the previous judges, because we are permitted to see his personal exercises and how he was brought into accord with the mind of Jehovah, first personally and then as giving a spiritual lead in his father's house and in the city. There are deep moral lessons here such as we have not had before; a getting back to the true basis of our relations with God. Nothing else will really displace what is idolatrous. It is remarkable that there is no sin-offering; it is rather the bringing in of what is positive as securing acceptance, so that idolatry may be completely displaced. The true ground of Israel's blessing is seen, and in the light of it Baal is seen to be worthless.

We have to watch carefully the things which appeal to us naturally. If we are going on with God, these things would never get power. If a young convert turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and wait for His Son from heaven, as the Thessalonians did, and went on in that way, he would never fall under the power of the Midianites. To fall under their power shows that we have got away from God; otherwise their influence would have no power over us.

The first part of this chapter shows Israel's public position. The people of God generally are influenced by what they have in common with men naturally, and they have lost the enjoyment of the produce of the land. God takes up Gideon, a man personally exercised. He was concerned about the state of things; he felt it and was doing his best to save a bit of the produce of the land from the Midianites. He wanted a little food for Israel. That is the kind of man God can take up; he is presented as feeling the situation. He is a kind of Timothy. This chapter goes with Timothy. Gideon is the result of prophetic ministry; if there is a cry to God, before He can reach His people, He brings things home to their consciences. He sends a prophet. Gideon is the result of prophetic ministry; his conscience was exercised and his heart. Paul says of Timothy, "being mindful of thy tears". A man who would shed tears over the state of the church is the kind of man God can use. Here is a man feeling the state of things, but with a true desire to preserve what is of Christ. Such a one God can use; He says, "Jehovah is with thee". There was nothing outwardly to distinguish him; it looked as though he was rather cowardly, but his action morally was that of a mighty man of valour. I suppose today a true sense of the position of things is power. Gideon had it.

It was an extraordinary thing to thresh wheat in a winepress, and a very difficult thing to do. The winepress suggests suffering. He was prepared to suffer that the people of God might have a little of Christ as food. How much are we prepared to suffer that the people of God may have a little of Christ?

These feelings are brought about morally by prophetic ministry. The prophet came, and there is conviction of the true state of things, and always with that there is a sense of what the people of God need; they need Christ — the wheat — to be made available. That is a great exercise, to feel the state of the people of God today, and to be greatly concerned that they should have more of Christ as food. God can work by a man like that, and give deliverance to Israel. If there are such feelings with us, if we have shed tears, God can use us, but there are very few to weep over the condition of the assembly.

Gideon had a great sense of his own insignificance. His thousand was the smallest in Manasseh, and he the least in his father's house. Gideon's was not at all a distinguished part of the tribe; it was the poorest in Manasseh. All this brings him to realise that, if he is to have anything to do with Jehovah or Jehovah's service, it must be on the ground of Christ, and we all have to come to that. If we are to be used of God, we must get entirely away from ourselves to be with God on the ground of Christ. So he brings his peace offering and his meat-offering. Gideon had learned (what had not come out before in Judges) something of the teaching of Leviticus, as to the peace-offering and the meat-offering and the altar; he had all these things in his soul. He had realised the breakdown of everything; if we do and if we have taken any true estimate of *ourselves*, we must feel how insignificant we are. So Paul said that he was "less than the least of all saints". Everyone should feel that. If so, I can only be with God on the ground of what can be wholly acceptable to God, every bit of which can go up in holy fire to God; that is Christ. Gideon was a Timothy; he was deeply concerned about the state of things. It was personal exercise in a day of general departure, a day when Israel was impoverished. Are we going to contribute to impoverishment or enrichment? We are all doing one thing or the other, either helping to enrich or impoverish. Gideon is helping to enrich. I think that his exercise was first personal, then local, then general. First he brings his peace-offering, and meat-offering, and it is accepted; and in the light of this wonderful instruction he builds an altar; his own personal relations with God are thoroughly adjusted. That must be the first thing; it is no use for us to think of serving the people of God if our personal state and associations are wrong. At the beginning of 2 Timothy, Paul presses personal state before he speaks about anything collective; he presses the personal character of the servant before he speaks of separation. What is the good of separation if one's personal state is not right? It is only Pharisaism.

The first exercise is to get adjusted with God, to have your altar individually, and then the Lord can enlarge the sphere of testimony, and make it influential locally. Gideon gets enlargement; he moves on from the peace-offering, which was for acceptance, to the bullock of burnt-offering. Speaking typically, he

gets enlargement in his apprehension of Christ. It is a fine thing to move on from a kid to a bullock. The kid of the goats was for Gideon's own personal acceptance, but the bullock of burnt-offering would bring all Israel into view. When Gideon is right personally, Jehovah comes in to give him an enlarged sphere of service, and in order for that there must be enlarged apprehension of Christ.

It is remarkable that there is no sin-offering; that is, God is going to set aside what is idolatrous by the positive blessedness of the footing on which everything stands according to His mind. A sense of what the people of God are with Him according to the preciousness of Christ as typified in the bullock would in itself overthrow what is idolatrous. It is all seen to be worthless. If we are with God in the blessedness of the bullock of burnt-offering — the largest conceivable expression of Christ in His delightfulness to God, it puts everything idolatrous out of court at once. So Baal and the Asherah are destroyed; everything is superseded, we may say, by Christ.

"The second bullock" suggests that nothing is secured for God in connection with the first order; everything connected with the first order has broken down, but Christ comes in distinctly as "the second". He is "the second man out of heaven". He took away the first that He might establish the second. "The first" in Scripture often applies to the natural and "the second" to the spiritual — see 1 Corinthians 15. These deep moral lessons have to be learned before there can be any warfare with the enemy. It is the preparation of the servant; he is put through the course of education to prepare him for service. We see in verse 34 that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Gideon. He blew a trumpet and certain of Israel were rallied to him.

Not only are spiritual conditions brought about in Gideon, but he learns to set great value on the sovereignty of God, and that comes out in the tokens that he desired to have from Jehovah about the fleece and the dew. That is, he wanted to be assured, not only of his personal acceptance, and of the general truth applying to Israel, the reinstatement of Christ as the ground of the relationship of the people of God with Him, but he also wished to be assured that he was moving in line with the present movements of God in sovereignty. It is important to recognise this. If Gideon had not learnt the lesson he would not have been ready to give up his army. There must be the recognition of God's sovereignty. Gideon does not rely at all on his own exercises, or the moral condition which had so far been brought about; he looks for distinct and sovereign movements of God wholly apart from what is of man. It shows the entire absence of self-confidence; he is just at the disposal of the Lord. The

dew of divine sovereignty is more to him than weapons of war. It was this that prepared him to have his army reduced.

The lesson at the end of this chapter about the fleece and the dew indicated a preparedness in Gideon to move in harmony with the sovereignty of God without looking at the balance of power. Three hundred are more effective than 32,000 if moving with the sovereignty of God. He had been learning this all along, and that is what gives Gideon his true character. He is a "barley cake"; he is of no importance at all externally, but he has the features of Christ; he is princely. These beautiful features of Christ are developed in this way for us; we see the absolute subjection of Christ to the sovereignty of God. He would not move at all outside the range of divine sovereignty; so, when the cities rejected Him, it makes Him thankful. He says, "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well pleasing in thy sight", Matthew 11:25, 26. There is the most perfect acceptance of divine sovereignty. That is what gives beauty to that verse, "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest". He invites us to come and stand alongside of Himself. He tells us where He is; He rejoices in the Father's sovereignty. Now He says, You come and stand beside Me, and I will give you rest. That is the place where rest is found.

The moral state may be there, but that does not in itself qualify one to be any help to the people of God. God will please Himself as to whom He uses, and how He uses them, and when He uses them, but then would I like to be retained for the service of God? Do I love the people of God so much that I would like to be retained? Nothing is of any value if God is not in it. Some very little thing may decide whether we are meet for the Master's use or not. John Baptist learnt this lesson; he says, "A man can receive nothing unless it be given him out of heaven", John 3:27.

These features in Gideon were very acceptable to God; they were not the exercise of unbelief, but the exercise of faith that was patiently feeling its way. This is the exercise of a man who is patiently feeling his way; he does not wish to be rash; we often are, when we think we are right. He wants to be assured of every step.

The Lord would never move without a word. He waited for Jehovah. It is said of Him prophetically, "I waited patiently for Jehovah", Psalm 40:1. Now Gideon waits to be fully assured that he is moving in the current of divine sovereignty, because the dew speaks of that. Micah S speaks of the dew as not tarrying for men, neither for the sons of men. It comes down in silent blessed power from

God; man has nothing to do with it. All the science in the world could not make one dew-drop fall on a blade of grass; it is purely of God. Gideon asked for a double test. He wanted to have adequate testimony; it was not unbelief, but the exercise of faith. He wanted a double testimony to the reality of the sovereign movements of God at that particular moment, and God answered it. It had to do with the deliverance of Israel. How was God going to move? No one could anticipate how. God might take up the most unlikely person in christendom. He chooses whom He will, and He works in such a way that, whatever He does, all the glory of it is seen to belong to Himself. If a person is not in line with God, some place is given to what is of man or of self; but, when God works, He works in such a way that all glory is His own. The beginning of the next chapter works it out in connection with Gideon's army. God says, There are too many for Me. If 32,000 get the victory, they will vaunt themselves that they have done something; so He thins them down. First of all the faint-hearted ones had to go, according to law, but still 10,000 were too many. God has to bring them down to 300. What could they do against an army of 130,000? It is entirely a question of what God can do; nothing is worth a straw but what God can do. If you come to that you get most profound peace.

If I am little enough God can take me up, and use me. Gideon retained the 300 men. Would you like to be retained? Every heart would say, Lord, retain me! If we are little enough, God will retain us. He retained Timothy, and 2 Timothy is very much a question of people retained as vessels meet for the Master's use. The only thing is to be absolutely at God's disposal. These 300 men were retained to be absolutely at God's disposal. Three hundred men at God's disposal were worth a great deal more than 32,000 that were not.

We read in verse 34 that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. This shows that something more than moral conditions are needed; there must be the power of the Spirit of God. If we had the most perfect moral conditions, that in itself is not power; power lies in the Spirit of God. There must be moral conditions first; there is not anyone in the New Testament upon whom the Spirit came apart from moral conditions. The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey; we could not think of the Spirit being given to a lawless person; it is a contradiction in terms. There must be obedience; then there must be the readiness to take up the testimony of the Lord. What do we want the Spirit for? We want the Spirit, not to get through, but to be supported for Christ. The evidence of those who have the Spirit is that they are really set for Christ.

JUDGES 7

Judges 7

This book shows us the principles on which God will help and deliver His people in days of departure. At every period of the church's history God has His own way of bringing in deliverance for His people. We have to be exercised to see what God's way is, so that we are not deceived by what is great and pretentious, but we learn to value what is of God.

It was carnal self-confidence when they said that only a few need go in Joshua 7. They did not take sufficient account of the power of the enemy; they were self-confident. But here it is a question of God giving deliverance in a way that was manifestly of Himself. It was "lest Israel vaunt themselves against me". God takes great pains to preserve us from vaunting ourselves. So here it is sifting things down; quality was wanted, not quantity, an important thing in a day of departure. 2 Timothy is a sifting epistle, an epistle that would reduce the available number.

The men that lapped were proved to be good soldiers; they were so in Jehovah's account. The object of 2 Timothy is to secure men who are retained as being serviceable to the Master. There is a great profession and Paul has to say that many had turned away from him. There is a kind of sifting in 2 Timothy to find vessels to honour. Paul says, Be a good soldier, one of the three hundred. The fearful element is eliminated: "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion", 2 Timothy 1:7. If there is not courage, we shall not maintain anything for God, but give way to the influence of the moment. The people of God protest, but give way. The lack at the present moment is that there is no moral courage to stand for what is of God.

In the previous chapter it is more the personal exercise of Gideon, but now it is a question of the kind of instruments God can use. God will not use anything that will bring glory on what He uses; He will keep the glory for Himself. There is a great lust for numbers among the people of God. Numbers do not always mean unity; the greater the number, often the less the unity. We had better have three hundred of one mind, joined in soul, and all minding and speaking the same thing, than 32,000 that are so many men, and so many minds.

If we want to be chosen and retained, we must be very particular as to how we do small things, things that seem to be trifling. Let each pray, Lord, retain me for service. Paul says to Timothy, "Take thy share in suffering as a good

soldier of Jesus Christ". What is personal must precede what is collective. It was apparently a very simple thing to be brought down to the water to drink, but it was a divine test, and none of us knows when we are going to be tested. It makes it very solemn how we go on through the details of everyday life. Something may come to light, in the way I do the small details of my personal or home life, that disqualifies me to be retained for service in any special way; and in connection with small things some feature may come to light which God approves for His service. You may see a person retained for service; we can often recognise those who are so retained, but we do not know the secret. Perhaps in some small ordinary matter they have acted for the Lord, and He says, I will retain you for my service. There are vessels for honour, meet for the Master's use, retained for service. One would covet to be retained for service so that one could serve Israel, and could serve in a definite and effective manner.

They had to drink; it was a necessity, but they just picked it up in their hands and lapped it; there was no taking it easy, no indulgence. It was a small thing, but it has come to me that any of us may be tested constantly in little things, and, if we do not do little things in a way pleasing to God, we shall not be retained for service; we shall be dishonoured. It is not a question of whether we are Christians, but we shall not be retained. The question is, Does the Lord approve me? I do not approve myself; the apostle says that it is not the one who commends himself, but whom the Lord approves. What is the use of my commending myself to the brethren, if the Lord does not commend me to the brethren? I am simply nothing, and, if the Lord does not commend me to the brethren, I cannot serve them.

In divine movements it is a great thing to be confirmed. God delights not only to guide, but He takes pains to confirm His people, so He sends Gideon down to the camp to hear the dream and the interpretation. Not only was Gideon's hand strengthened, but he was made a worshipper. The worshipper alone is a true warrior. It is a fine thing to get this dream and the interpretation; it would make us all worshippers.

By the cake of barley bread Gideon would learn his own littleness. Gideon was a true cake of barley bread at the beginning; he says, "I am the least in my father's house". He has small thoughts of himself; that is power. Have we accepted the fact that Christ was crucified through weakness? That is the power of God. "The weakness of God is stronger than men", 1 Corinthians 1:25. It is wonderful that God should set Himself forth in such a statement. God has taken the way of utter weakness. Nothing could be weaker than a dead man; as long as a man is alive there is some strength, but when a man

is dead there is utter weakness. Now God says, That is my power. We are slow to take it in and accept it. The cake of barley bread sets forth the utter weakness and insignificance of what God takes up, and if we are to be of any service in Israel we have to come to it that God takes up weak things, ignoble things, despised things, and foolish things, and things that are not. Are we prepared to be taken up in that character? If not, God will not take us up at all.

In the consciousness of that we worship, and that will fit us for conflict. Worship means that I have entirely done with myself; God alone is before me. There is no worship until God is the exclusive Object of the heart. I may only be sustained for a few minutes, but when I worship there is nothing present to my soul but God. That is power; there is nothing so powerful as worship. The creature filled with God is a creature filled with power. The apostle dwells on it with great assurance. "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling", 1 Corinthians 2:3. These are not figures of speech; I believe the apostle went about his service actually trembling. I am often glad when I see a brother trembling when he gets up to speak. I think, The saints will now get something. I believe this chapter is the Old Testament version of 2 Corinthians 4. Earthen vessels indicate in a striking figure the kind of instruments that God delights to use. How little one has been impressed by the fact that weakness is really power!

Barley sets forth Christ in all the lowliness and outward weakness in which He was found here; He had no resources in Himself. Here it is rather a figure of the saints than of Christ, that we have to be prepared to take the place of being of no account. Paul learned to glory in being a cake of barley bread; he lived to learn to glory in his weakness. Paul had to go through a great deal of discipline and he learned experimentally in his service that weakness and fear and much trembling attached to him. Then he learned it under the discipline of God; he had a thorn for the flesh, which was an additional help to him, so he had nothing at any time but the consciousness of weakness. Then he was thrown into prison; he had no chance of preaching; he was circumscribed in every way, and the power of God never came out in him in such a way as it did after he was in prison. He learned the secret of "when I am weak, then I am powerful", 2 Corinthians 12: 10. He was in the spirit of worship like Gideon — "he worshipped". It is wonderful to be made to realise one's own weakness, and only to have a feeling of worship. We see it in type in Gideon, I but we see it in personal experience in Paul.

When we come to battle, the weapons of warfare are not carnal. There is a trumpet and a torch and a vessel here; in actual battle there is a trumpet, a

torch and a *broken vessel*. The trumpet suggests the testimony rendered, as Paul says, "we also believe, therefore also we speak", 2 Corinthians 4:13. If we can bring in what is of God, that defeats the enemy, in whatever shape he may be found. I suppose power lies always in divine testimony; power is the setting forth of what is of God. Nothing delivers from what is *not* of God except bringing in what *is* of God.

The torch would answer to God shining in the heart of a man for the shining forth of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. That is the torch, the light. Paul says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" — it is the light in the earthen vessel, but then the breaking of the vessel is needed. It comes out in Corinthians in the way that the vessel is subjected to the most severe discipline. The vessel is brought into correspondence with the death of Jesus. It is the light that is the treasure; He has shone in our hearts for the shining forth. The light shines in to shine out, and we have it in earthen vessels. I have no doubt that this chapter was in Paul's mind. The excellency of the power is from God, and not from us. "Every way afflicted" — that is the vessel "but not straitened", that is the power of God. "Seeing no apparent issue" — that is the vessel — "but our way not entirely shut up", that is the power of God to keep the way open. "Persecuted" — that is the vessel — "but not abandoned", for God is there. "Cast down" — that is the vessel — "but not destroyed"; there is the power. As to the vessel there is nothing but the experience of affliction; all this is like the breaking of the vessel. So the light shines out. If what is of God shines out, it efficiently and completely overthrows what is of the enemy.

What marks the vessel is not strength but weakness. It is an earthen and broken vessel. The servant must come into harmony with the dying of Jesus, and it is bearing it in our bodies. The dying of Jesus is the breaking of the golden bowl. All the blessedness of what God is came out through the breaking of the golden bowl. In the dying of Jesus we see a divine Vessel; but then all in that Vessel only became available to men through His dying. That is the secret. Now are we prepared to be in harmony with that? That is the way of power. The great exercise with us now is that the life of Jesus should be manifested. The life of Jesus is love in activity. If that is to come out in me, it means death to all that I am naturally; that is the way of power. None of us likes it naturally; but it is the way of power.

Gideon says, "Look on me, and do likewise". That is the true power of a leader; he not only tells us what to do, but he exemplifies it himself. That is a true leader; the apostles could say, "Look on us", Acts 3:5. The blowing of the trumpets is the sounding forth of the testimony of God. "We also believe,

therefore also we speak". The trumpet sounded very loudly from Paul. Nothing more was needed to be done; the enemy was destroyed.

This chapter shows confidence in God in contrast to confidence in the flesh, and the willingness to be reduced so that glory may all belong to God. That is a very important principle. When the trumpet has sounded it speaks only of God; it is what is of God, brought into evidence. That does its work. The apostle tells us that the weapons he used were powerful through God for casting down strongholds.

In the sovereignty of God He will retain those whom He will for His service. We have to recognise that it is a matter of sovereignty, but that does not shut out desire on our part, so that we can have exercise and desire to be retained for service. When God takes up a person sovereignly, it will be found that there are moral features in that person suitable to God. It is like the "vessels to honour", gold and silver vessels. When God puts honour on a vessel there will be found suitable moral features. God has not provided for His own dishonour. The thing is to be serviceable, to be ready: we might not be used necessarily, but am I ready to be used? In the sovereignty of God I might not be used in His service, but am I ready? I have seen it illustrated in works where it is necessary that things should go on; there are two engines, and one apparently does nothing, but in case of emergency it is ready. It is a great thing for us to be ready; so, if the Lord wants a vessel, we are just where He can use us, and we are in a condition to be used. The three hundred represent vessels ready for the Master's use; they are retained for service.

JUDGES 8

Judges 8

It is not always enough to get a signal victory over the enemies, for other testings come along. If we have found the secret of victory we are tested whether we are ourselves in the good of it. We find here that the men of Ephraim were not happy about the way things had been done. These brethren did not recognise the great principle which had so much to do with the victory — the principle of sovereignty. They felt they had been overlooked or passed by. We have to be prepared for that. The Lord works by whomsoever He will, and we have all to be prepared to be overlooked; it is a real test.

Gideon took a lowly place in meeting what was really self-importance. The way to meet self-importance is to exhibit the opposite spirit. Gideon meets it by making much of what they had done, and little of what he had done. The spirit he showed was the divine corrective of the spirit that marked the men of Ephraim. They had taken two princes, and Gideon makes the most of what they had done. We should always go on that line; not to minimise, but to make the most of what the brethren do. Paul says to the Philippians:

“regarding not each his own qualities, but each those of others also”.

Philippians 2:4. We take account of all that is good in the brethren. If we all moved on this line, the self-importance would die a natural death. J.N.D. was a wonderful example of this; he always spoke as if he admired and envied the gift of an evangelist; and in describing his own labours he felt he was only a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. That is the right spirit. If you can only serve, you do not want any importance. Gideon says, I have done nothing; your gleanings are better than my vintage. So he won the brethren. It is just as important to win the brethren as to defeat the enemy. “A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city”; if you can win an offended brother, you have done more than great military exploits.

Gideon still goes on with his three hundred men, though they were faint. Then he gets another test by brethren of even a worse character than the men of Ephraim, that is, the men of Succoth; and at Penuel he finds Israelites with no interest in what is going on. They were quite neutral; they were totally unsympathetic with those fighting the Lord’s battles. That is another test. Are we prepared to go on in spite of that?

Gideon had a right to count on sympathy and support, they were Israelites, and his men were faint and weary; but he finds a total lack of sympathy. Nothing is more trying to the spirit than to be engaged in the Lord’s battles and to find no support from those who profess to be His people. Such

represent people who look at what is going on in connection with the Lord's interests in a natural way, and, one might say, prudentially — thinking that there was little chance that 300 men, faint and weary against 15,000, would come back victorious. If we look at divine things in that way we shall be entirely unsympathetic with everything God is doing. The question was not whether they were faint and weary, or whether there were 300 against 15,000, but the only question was, Is Jehovah with those three hundred men? They did not take any account of where the Lord was. In times of conflict there are a great many who look at things from just a prudential point of view; they do not consider where the Lord is, so they miss their opportunity, and they come under the Lord's retributive ways. A solemn retribution comes on these people. The Lord never gives up His retributive rights. The Lord has a right to serve out to people what they deserve, and He retains that right. The New Testament is full of it. Paul says, "I have declared ... that if I come again I will not spare", 2 Corinthians 13:2 That is the principle of retribution. If people fail the Lord in a crisis, they suffer for it. John says, in speaking of Diotrephes, "if I come I will bring to remembrance his works", 3 John 10. He holds the rod over Diotrephes; he does not say what he will do. I have no doubt that the coming of Paul to the Corinthians, and the coming of John to Diotrephes, were a kind of anticipation of the Lord's coming. The Lord would come representatively, and when the Lord comes He will give to everybody what they deserve; there is no mistake.

There is a great principle brought out in connection with all these things. The men of Succoth are not quite in the place of Zebah and Zalmunna, who represent antichristian opposition, and the power of antichrist. There is a power that would destroy the features of Christ, and these two kings of Midian represent that. They had killed all Gideon's brethren. That is positively antichristian. In Zebah and Zalmunna we see a deadly, murderous hatred of what is of Christ, and that is antichrist. There is a power that is against everything that is like Christ. They represent such influences as the religious world is full of today. John could say, "even now there have come many antichrists", 1 John 2:18. He said it at that time, when Christianity was not more than sixty or seventy years old. There is that working that is in deadly opposition to Christ, and all the features of Christ. We ought to be concerned lest we exhibit these features.

Succoth and Penuel were not sympathetic with the testimony of the Lord. Gideon and his men represent those who are maintaining the testimony of the Lord in the face of tremendous odds. It is a great thing to be sympathetic; if we cannot do much fighting we can be sympathetic. These things show the kind of testing and conditions that we shall sooner or later come up against,

and if we can move through these things with God it will be very good for us. It is those who are seeking to maintain for God who come up against these things.

We must not let a one-sided notion of grace predominate over everything else. We must hold the balance between divine grace and divine government. We are tested, not only by what we do, but by what we do not do. These people did not do anything actually against Gideon, but they became guilty on account of what they did not do. They did not give their support to what was of God at the moment. There are those who fail in that way; they wait to see how things are going to turn out. These people said, If you had got the victory, that would be another matter, we will wait and see how things are going to turn out. They looked at things prudentially; there was no vision of faith. Gideon's men were "faint, yet pursuing"; they did not give in because they were faint. It is faint people that can do wonders: "He giveth power to the faint", Isaiah 40:29. It is very serious to have bread — something that can support the present needs of the testimony of the Lord — and to withhold it. We are sure to come under retributive dealings.

Then Gideon gets another test. They say, "Rule over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also". They would set him up as head of a royal line; they would make a great man of him. Gideon appears in the character of an overcomer until the last stage of his history, and then he fails, and that makes it very solemn for us, especially for those who have gone through a certain amount of testing and come through it, through the mercy of God, perhaps more or less faithfully. Here is a man who is an overcomer; he walks worthily of the Lord to all pleasing up to a certain point, and then he breaks down. He had shown such a beautiful spirit; he would not rule over them, but said, "Jehovah will rule over you". He kept his place as a servant, as a vessel chosen for service, but, immediately after, another test comes along, internal, not external. It is one thing to overcome an external test, and quite another to overcome an internal test — something springing up in one's own heart. The desire to have the Midianitish earrings and ornaments sprang up in his own heart. He said, "I would desire a request of you"; and they said, "We will willingly give". It is something that springs up in his own heart now an imitation of what is divine. It is a man who has been a great success as a leader, and he fails on the priestly side; so he desires and constructs an imitation of the priestly ephod of Exodus 28.

Gideon is like many of those who have been much used for the deliverance of the people of God all through the history of the church. Many who have been extraordinarily used have failed in what is priestly; they have brought worldly

elements into the service of God. It is remarkable that this failure begins at the top; it begins with the leader. It is a warning not to commit yourself absolutely to any leader. A man may be divinely and spiritually a leader up to a certain point, and then he may entirely miss what is suitable to God at the moment. We have seen men marvellously helped up to a certain point and then there may be some kind of assumption. It is a very solemn thing to make an ephod; it represented the priestly thought in Israel. The ephod as an object was nothing; the value of the ephod was dependent on the person who wore it. An ephod without a priest was simply the form of godliness without the power of it, and that is what Christendom has fallen into, and largely under the influence of men who have been wonderfully blessed and used of God.

The preservative is to cultivate a deep sense of the spiritual character of approach to God; otherwise we may have the marks of what is Midianitish. There is nothing living about it. An ephod without a priest is a most solemn thing; it is but an outward form of what is priestly. Gideon in a certain sense prepared the way by his ephod for what was idolatrous; he put it there in his city, and they went after it. It really had an idolatrous character. The priestly idea was all perverted. So, as soon as Gideon died, they were ready for positive idolatry.

and it is solemn that so much of what is idolatrous has developed from men who laboured for the deliverance of Israel. They have perpetuated things in the public profession that are idolatrous in character, and not spiritual at all. They have been great as leaders, but they have failed as priests.

In the Reformation there was a great deal secured for man; it was a divine deliverance, but it did not secure much in a priestly way for God. It led to the setting up of what is Midianitish in a permanent form in the midst of Israel. We should be always watching against what is Midianitish being set up among us. It is one thing to be used of God for the deliverance of His people and the public defeat of the enemy, but quite another to consider for God. We can be supported by God in a wonderful way in service, and even after that fail to consider for God. If Gideon had considered for God he would never have thought of this ephod; it would never have come into his heart. The only man who is carried through safely is the one who always considers for God. The apostles all went right through; they did not break down, because they considered for God, and never a thought arose in their minds of substituting what was natural for what was spiritual. The moment of victory becomes the test. As long as we have to face the enemy we are kept on our knees in dependence, but when the enemy is defeated for the moment, and things are relaxed, we are off our guard and we rest on our oars. These things are very

exercising; they show the elements which we have to deal with, and they show us the secret of power, and the secret of departure and decline. There are certain features in Gideon which can be viewed as typical of Christ, but in a general way he represents a leader raised up of God amongst His people, marked by certain features of God; but he is liable to be betrayed in things not of God. In all things God is to be glorified. "To him be glory in the assembly", Ephesians 3:21. Glory all belongs to God. If we kept that before us, we should never make a Midianitish ephod.

JUDGES 9

Judges 9

Abimelech is not presented to us as one who delivered Israel, but as representing a principle that has been very much in evidence among the people of God. Like Diotrephes in the New Testament, he seems to be governed by the one desire to be prominent and to rule. He entirely lacked the brotherly spirit; he was so lacking in it that he slew all his brethren. We do not see in Abimelech a single spiritual feature from the beginning of his course to the end; so he is a warning rather than an example.

He is a great contrast to Gideon. Gideon in the main was marked by spiritual features, he failed at the end of his course, which is a solemn warning to us. But in the main he was marked by spiritual features, just the opposite to Abimelech; Gideon would not rule over Israel; he was small in his own eyes, and least in his father's house. He was consciously small and not wanting prominence. He only accepted the place of deliverer because it was thrust on him in the sovereignty of God.

Abimelech's origin resulted from an unspiritual connection on the part of Gideon. It is often Satan's way of working. Gideon had formed a connection that was not spiritual, like Abraham taking Hagar, and the result is that something comes in contrary to the mind of God.

Shechem had good features as well as bad. It is the place where Jacob buried his false gods. It is solemn to think that a place that had such good features should come to be marked by idolatry, and the setting up of a man like Abimelech to be king. It was the place of decision, where Joshua and the people made a covenant. So it is most solemn that this is the place where Baal-Berith, meaning *lord of covenant*, was set up; it was a terrible imitation of what God is.

We do not see a single divine or spiritual feature in Abimelech. He comes in as a place-seeker, and a power-seeker, and he is prepared to sacrifice and destroy anything that would hinder his getting a place. The result is nothing but contention and trouble, and it ends in Abimelech destroying the people, and the people destroying him. It ends in a terrible way in the government of God. That has often happened in the history of the people of God — men seeking a place, and that is largely the cause of the confusion and departure from God which has marked the Christian profession. The great value of this chapter is that God points out to us what will deliver us entirely from that spirit. Seeking place, prominence, rule and power — that spirit is worthless for

God. It is the bramble bush, and it bears no fruit that is acceptable to God. But in contrast to that we have wonderful instruction in what has value, and will deliver us from being brambles. None of us want to be brambles, but to escape we must be olive trees, fig trees and vines.

Jotham represents the faithful remnant. He was the last survivor of Gideon's sons; he could give a clear and decided testimony against dominant evil. The men of Shechem had no regard for Jehovah or for Gideon. Abimelech does not present himself to them as the son of Gideon, but "as your bone, and your flesh"; he took character from his mother, just as Ishmael did. We very soon forget what God has done for us. "The children of Israel remembered not Jehovah their God, who had delivered them out of the hand of all their enemies on every side. And they showed no kindness to the house of Jerubbaal-Gideon, according to all the good that he had done to Israel", chapter 8: 34,35.

The three trees — olive, fig and vine — are very often used in Scripture as representing God's fruitful people; they represent the features that God would have mark the saints. In Romans the olive represents the promises which had been given to Abraham. It represents the saints as deriving everything from God. God is the source of everything; that is the thought in the olive tree. The plain instruction is that it is not trees that have any value that want to reign, but worthless trees, the bramble, the thorn-bush. If I want to be somebody amongst the brethren, it only proves I am a bramble. It is well to take that to heart. We are to have the features of the olive, the fig and the vine; if we had, it would never come into our minds to want the place of rule, or prominence amongst the people of God. It is too far beneath us; it might do for the bramble, but not for the olive, the fig, or the vine; they cannot come down to such degradation as that. All three trees are standing figures of fruitfulness.

The thought of the olive is deriving all from God. The psalmist says, "But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I will confide in the lovingkindness of God for ever and ever", Psalm 52:8. The olive tree planted in the house of God would derive everything from God, and it flourishes. The saint who is an olive tree trusts in the lovingkindness of God *for ever*; he derives everything from God. To such a one a place of prominence or rule would be beneath him. If you are on the line of deriving from God, the measure of what you have surpasses everything you could mark out for yourself. It would surpass the most wonderful position you could ever have. A simple believer who is drawing all from God Himself, and is enjoying the fatness that is the substance of divine promise in the power of the Holy Spirit, could not entertain for a moment the thought of changing places with any

other, however exalted he might be. It would be a degradation, not an exaltation. The olive is too fat to come down to it. It searches us out, because the devil does not always offer us big things, but he may lead us to desire some sort of place in a small way.

The fulness of the blessing which God has conferred on us in Christ Jesus would take all the conceit out of us. There is nothing to aspire to, there is nothing greater than what I have. That is the wonderful place in which the saint is put, he has nothing to aspire to, he has what is greater than the whole world. He has fatness — all the fatness of God's house. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou wilt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures", Psalm 36:8. What is there for a man who is abundantly satisfied? There is nothing to offer him. Paul spoke of "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord", Philippians 3:8. He had the best thing possible. Where is the saint who would like to be a worldly king? There is not a saint on earth but would shrink from it. But how easy it is to want some place amongst the brethren! Many a man has come to grief on that line.

Jotham's parable shows how God would set His people up in superiority to every form of ambition. The olive tree would represent the spiritual man; he only can enjoy the blessing of God. It is said in Romans 11 that the root is holy, because it is of promise; it is altogether of God. If the root is holy, the branches must be. There is nothing more holy than the presence of the Spirit in the saints; that is what makes the saints holy persons.

The spirit of service would correct the desire to be great. The Lord says, "I am in the midst of you as the one that serves", Luke 22:27. It should be a great desire with every one of us to serve the brethren, to yield some oil for the brethren. If I could render the brethren some little service, that is something. If I could yield something spiritual to the brethren it would be a great gratification; but ruling over them is just the opposite. The olive yields that which honours God and men. It does not honour self. If we are olive trees we shall honour God and the brethren; we shall think highly of the brethren, and never think that we are superior to them. The olive tree says, "By me they honour God and man". If God gets His place, the brethren will have their place of honour too. It is yielding something; the olive yields, the fig yields, the vine yields. The question is, What am *I* yielding for the good of the brethren? It is good when a brother comes along and ministers, and you can see the saints' faces shine. He is an olive tree; that is the kind of man to imitate. The question is, What are the brethren getting out of me? not, How can I get my way? This spirit is the opposite to the Abimelech spirit, of which christendom is

so full. A great deal of the present state of christendom is a result of man wanting a place. The first coming in of it was with Ananias and his wife; they wanted a place among the brethren so as to be thought highly of as devoted people; they told a lie to the Holy Spirit to get a place. Then Simon Magus wanted to buy the power to give the Holy Spirit; he offered money; he wanted a place.

Jotham represents the remnant who are in the secret of God and of what has true value with God. It was not possible for him to come out as a rival to Abimelech; he did not think of such a thing. If a man desires to have a place, he always finds the place he desires, but he always ends at the bottom; he gets his skull fractured sooner or later. Jotham indicates the line of blessing on which God can hear us; it is striking that he says, "Hearken to me ... that God may hearken to you". This parable of Jotham is the secret of being heard of God. If we are not heard of God we shall not be worth anything; we shall only be brambles.

The fig-tree in Scripture comes in on the line of righteousness. Adam and Eve made themselves aprons of fig-leaves to cover themselves; in the language of the type, they attempted to establish their own righteousness. There was no real fruit there, but pretentious leaves. The fig-tree represents Israel as that from which God expected the fruit of righteousness; He expected what was right. The olive-tree rather represents what is spiritual; the fig-tree more what is moral on the line of righteousness. The olive tree represents the saints drawing from God the infinite and everlasting wealth of divine good, filled with fatness flowing thus from the fulness of God Himself, all spiritual enjoyment being in the Holy Spirit. The saint who is conscious of that would consider a position of rule, reigning over the brethren, far beneath him.

Nathaniel under the fig-tree had been recognising his own lack of righteous feelings; he had been confessing his own state, and there was no guile left in him; so he was a true Israelite, a true fig-tree himself.

In Jeremiah 24 we read of good and bad figs. The bad figs were those who would not submit to the government of God; there were very good and very bad, naughty figs, so vile that they could not be eaten. The good were those who had gone to Babylon; they had submitted to the righteous government of God. The others, who remained in Jerusalem and stuck to the place of privilege and pretension, were vile figs.

The fig-tree has sweetness and good fruit. It sets forth the moral line rather than the spiritual. The spiritual has to do with what a man is inwardly, but the fig-tree brings into evidence the moral character and course which the saint follows, and Paul says to the Philippians, "being complete as regards the fruit

of righteousness which is by Jesus Christ, to God's glory and praise", Philippians 1:11. That is the line of the fig-tree. In Hebrews 12 we read of the "peaceable fruit of righteousness". Righteousness always makes for peace. Why leave the beautiful characteristics of which the epistle to the Philippians speaks, to want to be exalted and think oneself better than one's brethren? My happiness consists in thinking better of the brethren than of myself.

I think that everything is exemplified in the Lord. He is the pattern of the olive-tree, the fig-tree, and the vine. He does not appropriate the two former titles, but He says, "I am the true vine", John 15: 1. He was really the true olive and fig-tree also. He has a right to rule, and He rules in a day when God has His rights. The question is, Do I want to rule now when neither God nor Christ have their rights? Paul says to the Corinthians, *You* are reigning as kings, but *we* are debased to the lowest possible point "the offscouring of the world", 1 Corinthians 4:13.

Then the vine clearly speaks of joy — "wine which gladdeneth the heart of men", Psalm 104:15. Here it is, "should I leave my new wine, which cheers God and man, and go to wave over the trees?" It is connected with joy. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace", Galatians 5: 22. There is nothing more to be lamented than the absence of joy among the people of God;

they are not choice vines. God wants his people not only to be vines, but choice vines. If so, we shall have joy ourselves and make others happy. Eternal life involves fulness of joy. John says, after speaking of eternal life, "these things write we to you that your joy may be full", 1 John 1:4. I have a very feeble idea of how necessary it is to the joy of God that I should be happy.

The Lord said, "I will no more drink at all of the fruit of the vine until ... I drink it new in the kingdom of God", Mark 14:25. The Lord had spiritual joy of an earthly character in the company of His saints on earth. It was a great joy to Him to have a few hearts around Him who could appreciate Him and give evidence of being characterised by the Father's teaching, but all that was to be broken up by His death, and He would not resume any earthly joy of that character until He renewed it again in the kingdom, when God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. He had a little taste of it beforehand in the company of His disciples. He had His children: "Behold, I and the children which God has given me", Hebrews 2:13. The Lord had a profound joy in the company of His saints, but then His death came in; the Shepherd was smitten, and the flock scattered; all came to an end, but He says that He will have it again in the kingdom of God.

Gaius, in John's third epistle, was a very good example of these trees. He was yielding joy for the brethren, in contrast to the dreadful spirit seen in Diotrephes, which has been the blight and curse of christendom. We are all in danger of this spirit, and Jotham's parable is intended to affect us, so that in contrast we are concerned about yielding pleasure for God and man, as portrayed in the olive, the fig-tree and the vine.

JUDGES 10 TO 12

Judges 10; Judges 11; Judges 12

The history of Abimelech shows the spirit that has wrought such havoc amongst the people of God — men without the knowledge of God seeking place and prominence. It leads only to strife and contention and destruction; it is a warning for us.

In Jephthah we see a man with true faith; he is mentioned among the worthies in Hebrews 11 and has the power of the Spirit with him, but he is not what we should call a spiritual man.

The general state of things in Israel now was apparently much worse. "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baals, and the Ashtoreths, 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 Philistines; and they forsook Jehovah, and served him not", chapter 10:6. It seems to be a more general departure than before, so that the chastisement of God is more severe. In verse 8 it says that the children of Ammon "oppressed and crushed the children of Israel". No such language had been used before. Then in verse 9 we read that "Israel was greatly distressed"; and at the end of verse 16 there is a touching word; "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel". Jehovah's soul was grieved for the misery of His people. It would seem to answer to the dark ages of christendom. In chapter 10 very little of the light of God seems to remain amongst God's people; but there is repentance in verse 10: "And the children of Israel cried to Jehovah saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served the Baals". There is a crying to God and a confession, but God does not answer in the way of deliverance. He says, "Go and cry to the gods that ye have chosen; let them save you in the time of your trouble". The condition is so serious that God has, as it were, to hold aloof from His people. This leads them into deeper exercise, so that in verse 16 we read, "And they put away the strange gods from among them and served Jehovah". There is a returning to Jehovah and confession, and then deliverance comes in by Jephthah, but it seems to be on a lower ground than with Gideon. There is no appearing of Jehovah, no divine appointment. Jephthah comes to the front simply by the necessity of the case; he is not brought forward by the direct call or appointment of Jehovah, but the people are driven to fetch him by their necessities. It seems as if God would humble His people even by the character of the deliverer He used; He humbles them by driving them to have recourse to one who had been hated and expelled as an illegitimate son, a man with no

status at all. There is a humbling character about the very deliverer that God was pleased to use.

Jephthah represents men whom God has used to deliver His people, but who are not spiritual men; men who have had faith to do what was needed in the necessities of the time, and who had the power of the Spirit to do it, but yet were not spiritual. To have the power of the Spirit does not make a man spiritual; he may still do things which are not according to the mind of God.

We see a different character of things in Samson; he is the last of the judges, and he presents the features that suit the last times, but I think Jephthah more answers to the Reformation time, when God was pleased to give faith and power to men who were not always spiritual, but who were suitable vessels for God to use to deliver His people. The very fact that they were not spiritual left its mark on all they did. God may use and bring forward men providentially to deliver His people who have not the features of spirituality. The fighting here is on the wilderness side of Jordan; that is the territory the enemy was trying to seize. It represents the kind of fighting there was at the time of the Reformation, when the effort of the enemy was to rob souls of the blessing that belonged to the wilderness side of Jordan. Could a man be separate from the world, be justified by faith, and have the Spirit, so that the moral beauty of Christ could come out in him? That was the battle at the time of the Reformation; the enemy tried to rob them of all that had been given to them in Balaam's parables. Men at the time of the Reformation were not characterised very much by spirituality, there was faith there, and power there, but not always spirituality; therefore it left its mark on the Christian profession to this day. If we are not spiritual, though we may have faith, and the power of the Spirit of God, we shall be open to all kinds of assaults of the enemy.

The Ammonite wanted to possess the territory that should be held for Jehovah. Moab and Ammon represent the result of the people of God being led by sight and not by faith; they are the children of Lot. Lot really gave up the path of faith. It was not that he was not a believer; he was a righteous man, but he gave up the path of faith. If there is an element admitted that is not of God, it leaves its mark. Even if there is a great and honoured servant, if there is something there not of a spiritual character, it leaves its mark on all that is the fruit of that servant's labour. Jephthah recognises Jehovah; he spake all his words before Jehovah, and we are told that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him. But he was not content with that; it would have been well if he had let that suffice, but he made an unspiritual vow. The vow spoiled the victory for Jephthah.

Jephthah's vow was not a true vow; it was a bargain. There is a great difference between a vow and a bargain. Hannah's vow was a spiritual vow. She said, "O Jehovah of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thy handmaid, but wilt give unto thy handmaid a man child, then I will give him to Jehovah all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head", 1 Samuel 1: 11. She wanted something for Jehovah. But Jephthah's was a bargain, and it was unnecessary, because, if the Spirit of Jehovah was on him, he needed nothing more; he did not need a vow. A spiritual vow must be an intelligent vow. Jephthah's was not intelligent, because he did not know what he was doing when he made it, and there was nothing for God in that. It was the fervour and zeal of an unspiritual nature, and it only brought sorrow and trouble. He said, so to speak, If you give me victory, I will do something. Deuteronomy speaks of choice vows; it supposes the people of God are so filled up with the blessing of God and the love of God that they want to give some of it to Him. The true thought of a vow is that we are so enriched that we should like to come out in a special way for God. So the Lord Himself speaks prophetically of His vows: "Thy vows are upon me, O God", Psalm 56: 12. His vows were intelligent vows; He knew all that was involved in them. Jephthah did not know what was involved in this vow; therefore it was not a spiritual vow. The Lord knew His vows involved the offering up of Himself as a burnt-offering, and He never shrank back or repented of it; He went right through with it. He made His vow when He said, "Lo, I come to do thy will", Hebrews 10: 9. He dedicated Himself to the will of God, and that meant the offering up of Himself as a burnt-offering, and not someone else.

We have Paul's vow at Corinth: "having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow", Acts 18: 18. He finished his vow just as he left Corinth; that shows it was taken or carried out while he was in Corinth. I believe that when Paul went into that idolatrous, licentious, and proud city, full of intellectual glory, he felt that he must be specially for God in that place, and he took a vow. He met all the condition of the city by a special devotedness to God and to Christ.

We have all the instruction about vows in the Old Testament. We do not have the thing in terms in the New Testament, but we have the spirit and the principle of it. The principle of a vow is that one is devoted in some special way to the Lord. But Jephthah's vow is a warning; it is a vow of an unspiritual man; he little knew what it would cost him, and it was a sorrowful man with garments rent who realised what his vow meant.

The solemn thing in Scripture is that God seems to hold people to their vows. It is said. "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest

vow and not pay", Ecclesiastes 5: 5. So it says, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God", Ecclesiastes 5:2. When anything is uttered in the nature of a vow, God seems to hold his people to it. Jephthah found no way of escape from his vow.

We see much that is a warning in Jephthah's history. The closing incident in his history is seen in chapter 12, where the men of Ephraim come and complain that they are left out. These men of Ephraim seem to be touchy brethren; they are always ready to complain if they are left out. Gideon knew how to conciliate them; he got the victory over them on the line of the Spirit of Christ, but Jephthah killed 42,000 of them. It was not a spiritual thing for Israel to be fighting with Israel; it was the first time such a thing had happened in Scripture. It is not spiritual for the brethren to be fighting and killing one another. Jephthah lacked the conciliating spirit that we see in Gideon, who met their jealousy and complaints by saying, I have done nothing; you have done great things. He conciliates them and gets the victory. Ephraim was wrong in finding fault with Jephthah, and threatening to burn his house, but Jephthah was just as wrong in going to war with them; it was a terrible spectacle.

These incidents emphasise the difference between what might be called the external aspect of the Spirit, and the internal aspect of the Spirit. Jephthah represents a man who was in the power of the external aspect of the Spirit, but not in the good of the internal. The Spirit of God can come upon any man; He came on Balaam and on Saul. But what marks truly spiritual persons is that they have not only the Spirit on them for power, but they have the Spirit of Christ in them to give them new sensibilities and feelings inwardly. That is what Jephthah lacked. The Lord speaks in Luke 24 of the disciples being "clothed with power from on high", verse 49. That is external. In Acts 2 it is said, "there appeared to them parted tongues, as of fire, and it sat upon each one of them". That is external. The Spirit came on them for power, but in John 20 it is different: "He breathed into them, and says to them, Receive the Holy Spirit". Now they are to be spiritual. A man with the inbreathing of the Spirit would never kill the brethren. The prophets were a great contrast to such as Balaam and Saul — the power of the Spirit of Christ rested on these, but it says of the prophets that the Spirit of God was *in* them. They were intensely spiritual men, marked by the most intense affection for the people of God, and characterised by readiness to suffer for them. They were marked by suffering love. That was inside. That spirit will never make rash vows, and will never slay the brethren.

Jephthah was a genuine man. There was a true recognition of Jehovah with him, and yet what he did was a perpetual sorrow in Israel. The virgins kept up a memorial of it for ever. Then the 42,000 men of Ephraim whom he slew left a permanent gap in Israel. Israel had to suffer for all time because this man was not spiritual — a man of faith and power, but not a spiritual man. It is a solemn warning.

JUDGES 13

Judges 13

It is a comfort to read a chapter in the Judges where all the actings are of God. In this chapter we have the great principles on which power would come in for the salvation of the people of God in the last days: that is, all is viewed in this chapter from the divine side. As we go on with the history of Samson we may see a mixture, but in this chapter there is no mixture — all things are of God. The conditions are indicated to us on which divine power will come in to save the people of God at the end. Samson was the last judge; and he represents the last intervention of God in the deliverance of His people before the kingdom is publicly set up.

The principle of sovereignty comes out here, for Samson was taken out of the tribe of Dan. The tribe of Dan does not appear in Scripture in a very illustrious light, but in sovereignty the movement begins there. It is of interest too that the Philistines are the adverse power; they have appeared before in the book, but not at all prominently. It is said in chapter 15. "Samson judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years". The Philistines are not among the seven wicked nations of Canaan that God had pledged Himself to dispossess, so they represent something different. They seem to represent people who are outwardly in a position that corresponds with what God has given His people. They had come up out of Egypt to the land; their history outwardly was like that of Israel, but they had come up in a natural way. They had never been under the blood of the passover lamb; they had not been redeemed; they had not gone through the Red Sea or Jordan; they had no experience of God's ways and discipline through the wilderness. Is not that very largely the character of things in the Christian profession today? God speaks in 2 Timothy of persons who have the form of piety but deny the power of it — they deceive by imitation. They seem to indicate Philistine elements come up out of the world into the Christian sphere without conversion, without the work of God; there is no true knowledge of God with them. Those are the conditions in which the testimony of God is found today, surrounded and in danger of being influenced by Philistine elements. In presence of such conditions, power is a very great necessity. How can we meet those who deny the power? Only by having the power.

The point in this chapter is, "*He shall begin to save Israel*", verse 5. While we recognise that certain leaders are raised up to do a prominent work, yet we should all be animated by the desire to save Israel. One marked feature in connection with Samson was the individual character of his labours; we never

find him leading armies into actual warfare, but what he does, he does single-handed. This character of things is largely contemplated in 2 Timothy; it is an individual path of faithfulness. The more the Christian profession is leavened by the Philistine element, the more necessary it is that we should know what it is to act in the power of God. Timothy was to be a partaker in the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; he was to be a Samson in relation to the testimony, though a weak and timid man. The whole principle on which power comes in is the principle of separation to God. The great feature of 2 Timothy is the insistence on the principle of separation — one is to be a Nazarite to God.

We find in this chapter God's sovereign movements; we have not the exercises or failures of Samson. God has moved sovereignly; the Nazariteship of Samson was not voluntary, not the ordinary vow of a Nazarite, but a definite call from God to Nazariteship. We read in verse 5, "The boy shall be a Nazarite of God from the womb", and again in verse 7, "The boy shall be a Nazarite of God from the womb to the day of his death". Now salvation for Israel comes in on that line; it is God's side — we are committed to it. If I see the sovereignty of God in connection with myself, my exercise is that I may come up to the call of God. It is an exercise for every one of us whether we have come up to what God has marked us out for and called us to.

Paul says, "God, who set me apart even from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace", Galatians 1: 15. It was pure sovereignty that God separated him. He says in Romans 1, "separated to the gospel of God"; that is, separated from every human thought, separated to the gospel, a gospel Nazarite. Then with Timothy there were certain prophecies as to what he was to be as a servant of God, and he is to take up the exercise. All corresponds with the prophecies which preceded. The divine mind was there as to him. You say, That is Timothy; but God has a definite mind in regard to every one of us. We are all called to be separate to God. There is no option given to Samson's parents and no option left to Samson; he has to move on a certain line from his mother's womb to the day of his death; and if he left that line he was ruined. I believe that is as true of you and me as of Samson; if we do not come up to the divine calling we shall be spiritually wrecked. God's sovereign will is that we should be in complete separation from all human thoughts, from everything that has its source in Egypt; we are to be apart from influences that are natural and unclean. We are to be in separation to God, and prepared to be in a place of outward reproach. No razor was to come on his head — that was the secret of power. If I realise I am moving on the line of God's sovereign will it will give me great power. I am not taking the initiative and hoping God will support me — many a man is like that. If God has called us to

the path of absolute separation, He will maintain us in the path He has called us to. The Lord came into this world with the vows of God upon Him, and He is the true Nazarite, absolutely separate from all natural excitement and from everything that would exhilarate the natural man. He was absolutely separate and apart from everything unclean, and He always carried in full sympathy in His own spirit the reproaches of God. "The reproaches of them that reproach thee have fallen upon me", Romans 15:3. He was so absolutely separate to God that everything man could say against God came upon Him. That is the One who could save Israel; God can save Israel by that spirit.

Divine power would come out in ability to correspond with the position in which we are sovereignly placed. If we are prepared to welcome all His sovereign will, we shall welcome our assigned position in sovereignty. A brother has an assigned position; he is to be marked by readiness to pray everywhere — both at home and in the assembly; that is the sovereign will of God. Each brother and each sister is set in God's assembly, and they are set there to function in a certain manner according to the sovereign will of God, and, if we are not, we are failures. If divine power comes in, it would help me to function according to God's sovereign will. "God has set certain in the assembly" — that is a matter of gift. There are certain gifts, and they are graded, they are not all on one level. We must learn our grade in the assembly; it is no use to pretend to be an apostle if I am only a help. If I am content to be a help, power will come in in accepting the sovereignty of God. If we get out of the position in which God in His sovereignty has set us, we cannot expect power. We must not think that Nazariteship is for certain brothers and sisters only; we are under obligation to take the place of Nazariteship, and power lies in honestly accepting and answering to the obligation.

We must not have persons before us instead of the Lord. In this chapter Jehovah seems to say, You must keep Me in mind and not think too much of Samson. The One whose name is Wonderful is acting; now He raises up a spiritual leadership. If I look at a spiritual leader critically I may see defects, but, if I recognise the sovereignty that has put him in that place, I shall not look for defects but for evidence of the power of God. Our happiness in going on together largely depends on each one of us knowing our own place and filling it, and recognising the place which God has assigned to every other brother or sister. Spiritual power will be in proportion to our separation.

The angel's name is Wonderful. It is a great thing to have before us the One who is Wonderful and who is acting according to His own wonderful Name. When He called me in His grace,

and when He set me in a certain position in the assembly, He was acting according to His wonderful Name. Through the assembly is made known the all-various wisdom of God — it is the setting forth of the wonder of God's Name. What a pity to let Philistines come in to dispossess us from these precious thoughts! We need power to act against the Philistine element, and the power is according to the coming down and ascending of Christ Himself. He comes down in this chapter and ascends in the power of the burnt-offering.

The angel would direct the thoughts and heart of Manoah to Jehovah. He said, I will not eat anything you have brought. It is interesting that it is a kid and not a bullock. It is a time when there would not be a greater apprehension than a kid; still it is Christ — it is the burnt-offering and the oblation. There is the carrying out of the sovereign will of God that Christ should go into death for His people. God gives power according to the value of Christ. This is wonderful instruction in the character of divine power. Divine power would bring the Nazarite to the true place of the burnt-offering. Samson's weakness came in on the line of self-gratification, whereas the spiritual instruction set out in chapter 13 is that power moves on the line of self-sacrifice. The angel goes up; divine power is connected with an ascending Christ. People say, There is no power. Is Christ not at the right hand of God? Has He not ascended? All that power is available for every separate man and woman in this world. If there is a vessel unto honour, a vessel marked by Nazariteship, all the power of the ascended Christ is there to support and succour. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" — that is the risen and glorified Man, and the power that is in the Spirit down here is commensurate with the glorious place of the ascended Christ. We are to be spreading forth that kind of atmosphere here. That is the sort of atmosphere in which Samson was born; he was begotten of the principles of this chapter, and that is the secret of power in the last days. If Samson had but carried with him the secret! But what marked him was the giving up of secrets. What a dreadful thing for a man called to be a Nazarite — whiter than snow — to give up his secret to a wretched Philistine woman! What could be more humiliating! What could be more degrading! But it is just a picture of what might happen to any Christian. If we give up divine secrets, we shall lose our power.

JUDGES 14

Judges 14

In the history of Samson there is a very marked contrast between his exploits and his personal character. The Spirit of God would suggest to us that we must distinguish between what was done by Samson by divine power and the weakness that was in Samson himself. His personal weakness was a great contrast to his spiritual power. So it would seem as if his history is in two parts, which in a sense have to be looked at separately. We see in Samson something greater than the weakness that marked him as a man. Perhaps it would be well if we looked first at the incidents in his history which are characterised by spiritual actings; and then consider the other side, those incidents in which we see Samson beguiled again and again into utterly false positions.

It is noticeable that there are three occasions where it is said that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him. There is a preliminary statement in the end of the previous chapter "the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him", chapter 13:25. That is before he came out in public service; it was in his own home. He is moved by the Spirit before he undertakes any exploits. We see the principle of that even in the Lord; there were spiritual movements in Him before He came out in public service. The private precedes the public. We are apt to put what is public forward, but we see Samson in private moved by the Spirit of God; there are exercises that no one knows anything about. "The child grew" — that would suggest that he is growing up under the blessing of Jehovah and the Spirit moving him. I think the home circle is where spiritual movements will first be found. The prominent feature in Samson is strength; he is marked by power. What comes out in him is of the greatest importance to us in the last days.

In 2 Timothy stress is laid on power, and we learn there the character of the Philistines, those who are opposed to the testimony of the Lord, not so much outside as inside. Divine power is needed to overcome them, so there is repeated reference to power. "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power", and then, "suffer evil along with the glad tidings according to the power of God" — and in the last chapter, "the Lord stood with me and gave me power".

We see the Philistine elements in 2 Timothy — persons who have come in amongst the people of God without any spiritual history. There is nothing vital about them; they have never learned how to solve the riddle. We have to

learn to solve the riddle, and no Philistine can solve it. He may borrow it from others, but that is a Philistine dealing in borrowed or stolen goods.

Divine power works, first in the rending of the lion, and then in the swarm of bees who lived in the carcase of a lion — that is, life in death. That is the riddle we have to face. We have to learn that the lion has been rent by divine power. In this instance Samson is a figure of the Lord. The Lord “has annulled death and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings”, 2 Timothy 1:10. That answers to the rending of the lion. Paul looks at Nero as representing all the power of the devil against the testimony. He would have swallowed up the testimony if possible, but there was divine power there so that the lion could not devour more — Paul was delivered out of the lion’s mouth. The starting point of everything lies there, that Satan’s power has been overthrown in death, anti life comes out of that. No Philistine could understand that. It puts the saints in an extraordinary position to have derived everything through death; that makes nothing of me or of anything I could attach to myself. It is very reducing to learn that all strength and sweetness has come through death. We cannot bring the Philistine into death; if we do there is an end of him. There is a mutual working of the energy of life in the carcase of the lion; the bees are there and are making honey. If you and I have nothing but what we have derived through the death of Christ, we shall work harmoniously together in making honey. It requires the co-operative activities of love, and no Philistine can take part in it. The apostle speaks in 2 Timothy of certain turning away from him, and in turning away from Paul they had left the testimony. Phygellus and Hermogenes were not marked by life, but Onesiphorus was. The activities of life are needed in 2 Timothy days, and that is where divine power comes in; in that way we should have honey for the Lord when He comes into the midst. He delights to partake of the fruit of the mutual activities of love amongst His people. On the ground of the death of Christ such conditions can be brought about; we can have food and sweetness as the result of the mutual activities of love, and the first acting of divine power is to bring that about. The angel might well say his name was Wonderful.

Chapter 13 shows that all power in the last days will depend on Nazariteship — on separation to God. In Samson we see the power of God illustrated and we also see the enticing and withering influence of the world which is brought to bear on saints to rob them of their Nazariteship. We do not lose things all at once, but in the end Samson lost his Nazariteship. It is a shame for a man to wear long hair — if we leave the place of shame we have lost our Nazariteship. We begin with the principle that all strength and sweetness and all the activities of life flow out of death. Paul says, “If we have died with him,

we shall also live with him" — he makes it the basis of everything. This works all through in a practical sense; we only touch life as death works on our wills and natural likings.

Samson turned aside to see the carcase of the lion. He was looking out for the fruit of triumph; he expected full fruit from his exploit. The Lord is looking on to see what is the fruit in us of His going into death; He did not intend it to be fruitless. The Lord came back in resurrection to eat the honeycomb; He came to see the fruit of His death, and He found the disciples together in love. Think of the risen Lord eating a piece of a honeycomb! Where there are the mutual activities of life, there support and strength are yielded, and there is sweetness. The honeycomb is the result of the mutual activity of love amongst the saints.

Samson is characterised by betraying secrets. There is no secret so precious as to cherish in one's heart that one has nothing but what comes out of Christ's death. Divine secrets are not published to everyone; they are only known by those divinely taught. *Mystery* is a characteristic word of Christianity. Think of people moving about this world with the secret that they derive nothing save through the death of Christ! A Philistine could never understand that. The test is that we are in the midst of people who admit the facts and assent to the doctrine of Christianity; some even are more intelligent than ourselves. Now have we a riddle that they cannot solve? A test is suggested in this chapter as to what is genuine. There is a divine proposal that if you can solve the riddle you will have a change of raiment. If we really solve the riddle spiritually we shall not only have a private source of sweetness and strength, and enjoy the mutualities of life with the brethren,

but we shall appear in a new style publicly. It suggests that we come out publicly in the features of 2 Timothy. Solving the riddle is the result of inward exercise, of learning in our souls that there is not a single thing that we attach the smallest value to that has not come to us through the death of Christ. That results in the mutual working of the company in love which produces food and sweetness. If we have solved the riddle we get a change of raiment; our external behaviour, character and associations are new. The spiritual instruction of this chapter is of vital importance if we want to take up things with divine strength in this day.

There was that in Samson's private history that was not in keeping with the outward, for the Spirit of Jehovah had moved him in secret. We must have a new kind of life both inwardly and outwardly brought in through the death of the Lord. Any kind of religious life I could have as a child of Adam goes for nothing.

We see the second example of Samson's power in verse 19, where he smites thirty men and takes their spoil.

The third example of power is in the next chapter, when his brethren would deliver him up and the ropes become as flax and he takes the jaw-bone of an ass and slays a thousand men. We see how little his brethren were in the secret that the power of God was with him. They were prepared to accept the rule of the Philistines, but if the power of Jehovah was with Samson it could not be of faith to accept the Philistine rule. This only served to bring out the greatness of the power there was in Samson. Divine power comes out in the use of instruments that men would not select for that purpose. Men would never select the jaw-bone of an ass as a weapon to meet a thousand men. The power of God, has manifested itself in selecting what is of no account. In 1 Corinthians we see that God chooses weak, base, foolish, despised things, and things that are not. We have to accept that as the way that divine power works. Paul had to be crippled as to his natural powers to make him serviceable.

The Spirit of God has sorted out the history of Samson for us by calling attention to the Spirit of Jehovah coming upon him. The Spirit has thus marked out certain features as being spiritual in character, and we have to separate them from the history of failures in Samson himself.

JUDGES 15 AND 16

Judges 15; Judges 16

It is well for us to keep in mind that, Samson being the last of the judges his history brings out the most important principles for us in the last days. It would seem that we learn in Samson the secret of strength and the secret of weakness.

It is mentioned twice that Samson judged Israel twenty years, indicating that there was that in Samson which was for the deliverance of the people of God. Just because there was that, he seemed to be especially assailed by things that would divert him and deprive him of his power. He sets forth exercises that come very closely home to our souls in these last days.

We have already noted this three times in which we are told that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Samson. Whenever that was the case he was marked by power to overcome, whether it was the lion or the Philistine. Then we see that power in itself is not sufficient to maintain us for God. There must be that which is inward. There may be great power for service in certain quarters and it is of the Spirit of God wherever souls are being converted and the people of God helped; but we see in Samson (verse 18) that, after doing very great exploits in the power of the Spirit of God, he after all was a thirsty man. A man may have the power of the Spirit of God on him for mighty acts of service, and yet not have inward satisfaction, the power of life in his own soul by the Spirit. These great lessons are for the last days. Power is a matter of sovereignty. God by His Spirit can work sovereignly; He can use any instrument He sees fit; but the real life and joy and satisfaction of our hearts inwardly is another matter. Many a servant may be publicly marked by extraordinary power in service, and yet not know the blessedness of inward satisfaction — he may be a thirsty man. At the end of chapter 15 Samson has to learn the Spirit in a new way. Perhaps the Lord would call our attention to the Spirit under this beautiful designation, Enhakkore, "the caller's spring". Paul speaks of "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"; he feels the need of this in order that he might meet his sufferings, persecutions, and pressure with an inward source of supply. The epistle to the Philippians brings out largely the inwardness of things.

There are two incidents in the life of Samson where he is seen as calling on Jehovah. One is in chapter 15:18, where he is very thirsty, and he called on Jehovah, "And God clave the hollow rock which was in Lehi, and water came out of it and he drank, and his spirit came again and he revived Therefore its name was called En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day". The other time is in

chapter 16:28: "And Samson called to Jehovah and said, Lord Jehovah, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may take one vengeance upon the Philistines for my two eyes". I would suggest that Samson as calling on Jehovah is a greater man morally and spiritually than he was in all the other incidents of his history. It is a peculiar resource of the last days that we call on the name of the Lord.

The power spoken of in 2 Timothy is an inward power rather than what is outward. I have known several instances of men who have served and been used of God, but when they had been withdrawn from what is external it came to light that they had very little of what was internal. Samson was one with a most extraordinary power — there is not a man in Scripture who externally had such strength — but, notwithstanding that, he was conscious inwardly that his heart was unsatisfied and he was a thirsty man. He has to call, and then, in type, he gets the Spirit in a new way in connection with what is inward — not power to do great exploits outwardly, but to satisfy his inward cravings. My impression is that in Samson calling on the Lord we see something morally greater than his killing thousands of Philistines. However much God is pleased to use me publicly, sooner or later the question is raised, Have I the thirst of my soul satisfied? Have I the Spirit inwardly, not only for outward power; that is "the caller's spring", a beautiful designation of the Spirit.

We are so apt to go on with what is outward, but I believe a time comes with every one of us when we are brought face to face with this question: I have had meetings, and they have been very precious; I have had the companionship of the brethren, and it was very sweet; I have had ministry and it has been happy; I have had the power for service and it has been wonderful, but I am not satisfied. None of these things or all put together will give inward satisfaction. Inward satisfaction would not detract from the power God gives for service; it would add to it. I think it was a poet who said, "All great deeds flow from the centre of a quiet heart". It is from a quiet, restful, and satisfied heart that the most efficient service flows; we want the caller's spring.

In Numbers 21 the proposal comes from the divine side. God says, "Gather the people together and I will give them water". But in John 4 we are to ask: "If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water". God is the Giver and He is seeking to awaken thirst by presenting what He has to give. It is of vital importance in these last days that we should know what it is to be in life inwardly; this book is exercise for the last days. The calling is

the expression of inward exercise. We do not see that in Samson's case when the Spirit of Jehovah comes upon him; that is the sovereign act of God. But what he gets in answer to calling comes in connection with his inward exercise. It is what is inward that will help us in the last days — something that God gives which meets the exercises and cravings that have been produced in our souls Godward. It is a personal and an individual matter.

In connection with this incident we find a remarkable little phrase which often occurs in the Old Testament, "to this day". These words have a moral force and indicate that the matter which is spoken of has a permanent place in the ways of God with His people. It is available for us now. The spring subsists morally unto this day; the Spirit as "the caller's spring" is there to this day. I would encourage all our hearts to entertain thoughts of the Spirit as "the caller's spring". We know a little what it is to be supported in our testimony and in our conflicts; but what is inside me is more important as far as I am concerned personally than anything I do in conflict outwardly. We see in Stephen the two things. There was an extraordinary power in his testimony; he goes through the whole history of the people and presses their guilt on them at every turn, but, great as Stephen's testimony is, he himself inwardly is as great, when he kneels down while they batter him with stones. That angelic face shines with the light of heaven while their murderous stones batter on it, and he cries, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". When you read that wonderful address, one of the most marvellous chapters in Scripture, you see the man in his extraordinary power. He is a king among men. When you see him kneel in prayer, you see the wonderful inwardness of him; Stephen inwardly is as great as Stephen outwardly.

Samson's second calling on the Lord was when he lost his sight and liberty. He had been betrayed into forfeiting his Nazariteship, and he was a poor blind prisoner making sport for the Philistines. He reached the lowest point that a servant of God could reach, and from that point he calls on Jehovah and becomes greater than he had ever been before. In spite of his falling so low, there is inherent power in Samson that is greater than all the power of the world and greater than all the power under which he fell.

If we look at the weaknesses that come out in Samson, we find that he was tested in three ways. The Philistine woman in chapter 14 represents what is natural; the harlot of chapter 16 represents what is carnal; and Delilah represents what is Satanic, for from the outset she is identified with the adversary and does her utmost to destroy Samson. God by His ways delivers His servant from each of these three snares. Samson's weakness left him open to these influences, but that which was of God in him extricated him in each

case from the snare. Satan will use either the natural or the carnal or the Satanic in order to undermine the truth of Nazariteship. He will try to rob us of our Nazariteship until he has done for us. But we see in Samson that, in spite of all the weakness that came out in him, there is something else there and God delivers him.

God delivers him from the Philistine woman in chapter 14 by keen disappointment. Samson did not get what he expected; he was keenly disappointed when he found he had a woman who betrayed his secret, and he was disappointed when he found that she was given to his companion. Many of us have known what it is to be influenced on the line of what is natural, and we have found on that line nothing but disappointment; we did not get a single thing that we expected. That is how God delivered us from the natural.

The harlot represents carnal or fleshly influences and, through yielding to these influences, Samson finds himself in a terrible place of restraint. He finds himself shut up in Gaza, the gates barred, and the people waiting to kill him in the morning. But we find that there is a power in Samson that enables him to make his escape. Speaking typically, there was something in Samson that was great enough to break loose from the snare in which he had been taken; he rises up at midnight and carries off the gates and bars of Gaza. That was not the Spirit of the Lord upon him; it was what Samson was himself, the inherent power in him which enabled him to do it. We have all seen cases like this, the saints of God taken captive by what is fleshly, but in many cases we have had the joy of seeing that there was inherent power in them as born of God that has enabled them to make their escape from the position into which those carnal influences had thrown them. It is a fine thing to see saints who have been overcome by the flesh and in terrible bondage rising up and freeing themselves, so that they have been able to carry off the gates and bars and they are recovered to the companionship of the people of God — that is what Hebron means. If we see a person who has failed restored to the companionship of the people of God, we are apt to dwell on the failure and to hold it as a black mark against that person for the rest of his life, I am sure that is not of God. I believe that, if a saint has fallen under the power of the flesh, and has found that he has a power as born of God to get free from it, we ought to be more occupied with the thought of the energy with which he freed himself than with the weakness which brought him into captivity. The cleansed leper was a greater man morally than the man in Israel who had never been a leper. That is a thing only understood in the school of grace.

Delilah represents what is Satanic, what is directly opposed to the testimony of God. From the first she does her utmost to get Samson's secret, and

eventually she succeeds. It is a most solemn warning. To think that a man who is the great picture of strength in Scripture should become such a melancholy exhibition of weakness! Power for the testimony of God lies in Nazariteship, and Delilah plies her arts on Samson until in the end she gets his secret, and then she betrays him. Then she takes good care not merely to cut his hair; she shaves it until not a vestige is left of his Nazariteship. He has yielded and given himself up to this wicked woman so that he loses every vestige of his Nazariteship, and the Philistines take him and bind him and put him in prison and actually make him an object of sport; he makes amusement for them. What a depth to fall to! Can any saint fall lower than that? They have put his eyes out, and he is reduced to the lowest point. But it is most encouraging to find that even then the energy of life is in his soul and his hair begins to grow. The man who has drunk at the caller's spring has life in his soul so that, whatever happens to him, his hair begins to grow. Although the Philistines had put out his eyes, it was only a deliverance,

for his eyes had been his ruin — “he *saw* a woman of the Philistines”, “he *saw* a harlot”. When they put out his eyes they only delivered him from that which had led him astray. That is God's government. However low we fall, God always acts on the line of deliverance, and when we fall under the power of Satan we are delivered as we accept the government of God. When Samson, the blind prisoner, grinding in the prison house, and making sport for the Philistines, called on the Lord, he was a greater man than he had ever been before. He could do more than he ever did before, but he did it by death. He had to learn that his own death was the secret of power. We have all to face these lessons.

The two callings on Jehovah are connected with the secret of power. The first calling in chapter 15 is connected with the power of life; the caller's spring is where the Spirit brings the power of life into a man's soul. The second power brings out the power of death, and we have to learn that the two things go together. Paul says to the Corinthians, “We who live are always delivered unto death” — “I protest by your rejoicing in Christ Jesus that I die daily” — and again, “Death works in us, but life in you”. Paul had not only learnt the secret of life but the secret of death. When Samson had learnt the secret of death, he was ready to be taken away. He had reached the climax; he slew more in his death than ever in his life. When I come to accept my death, the great secret of the power of God works in me, and I become an efficient instrument for the use of God.

JUDGES 17 AND 18

Judges 17; Judges 18

In the previous part of the book we found the people departing from Jehovah, forgetting Jehovah; but we come now to what is perhaps even more serious than that; what is idolatrous is definitely connected with the Name of Jehovah. It has application to idolatry in what might be called a Christian form.

Micah's mother teaches her son what is idolatrous, but it is connected with the Name of Jehovah. She says she has dedicated the silver to Jehovah.

The Spirit of God has called attention to the blessedness of the presence of the Lord in the midst of His saints, and the holy conditions that must be connected with the place where the Lord is known in the midst of His people, and there is a great imitation which takes an idolatrous form, but God's Name is connected with it. All the precious truths that are known at the present period are adopted, but cast into an idolatrous form. There is an imitation priesthood, the ephod, a son consecrated; it is the form, but it is imitation. It raises the question whether we are going on with spiritual reality, or with mere imitation.

This mother is an earth-dweller; a cursing mother, not a blessing mother like Jerusalem above. As we are true to heavenly light we are preserved from all forms which come in by something being substituted for heavenly light. I must have an image, a picture, or ritual, to make divine Persons more real to me. It is a turning aside from the spiritual.

It is easy for us to get on the line of graven and molten images. A molten image would be something that could be easily multiplied. It is cast in a certain form; it is like a fixed form of service. If we get into a fixed form, in our prayers and praises, we may be in danger of molten images, instead of what is living and suitable to the light of revelation. What is not in spirit and in truth tends to either a molten image or a graven image. A molten image is a thing that can be easily multiplied; you could print it in a book so that anybody could follow it. The graven image is a little more the product of the activity of the human mind — conceptions of God worked out in man's mind, not according to the light of revelation, but worked out according to the mind of man. I think the graven image would suggest that. We must beware of human touch in connection with the holy things of God.

It is solemn to think of a Levite, Moses' grandson, being mentioned in this way (chapter 17: 8 and chapter 18: 30); it is a terrible drop. He leaves Bethlehem-Judah to seek a place. His grandfather had said, "Blot me, I pray thee, out of

thy book". The true tribe of Levi answered to the challenge, "*Who* is for Jehovah". It is a terrible thing to drop down from that to sojourn and seek a place. This Levite was a kind of Diotrephes; he is not seeking a place for Jehovah, but seeking a place for himself. If we do that, the devil will be sure to have us identified with what is positively idolatrous.

In chapter 18 the Danites are looking for territory. They represent those who have been professedly and nominally on heavenly ground finding no satisfaction there and wanting another portion. It is a picture of the people of God seeking a place on earth, because heavenly territory makes too much demand on them. They speak of the land at Laish as being spacious in every direction and of there being no want of anything that is on the earth. There is a sphere of things that lies open to be seized on where people say, "We are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing". Micah's religion just suits those conditions. The heavenly ground was not spacious enough for these Danites, and they reached a place where there was no one who possessed authority to put them to shame, where conscience was never exercised. We see in Samson the power of recovery, though he exposes great weakness. But there was no recovery in these Danites; there was a terrible kind of secession going on till the days of the captivity.

There is a beautiful touch in the last verses of chapter 18. The house of God is in Shiloh all the time. If idolatry goes on, yet all the time the house of God is in Shiloh. Shiloh was lost to the Danites altogether, but it was there for such as Boaz, Elkanah and Hannah; the house of God was there. The two systems are in contrast here. There is a system that professedly gives Jehovah a place, but is essentially idolatrous and is connected with a wholly false position for the people of God, where they have no enjoyment of the God-given inheritance, but are under the influence of things on earth. On the other hand there is another system here; the house of God is in Shiloh, the tabernacle is there, and the ark is there.

The preservative from idolatry is in John's writings; they would preserve us from everything idolatrous, and that which has the character of imitation, what is not life. John would preserve us and keep us at Shiloh, the place where the rights of Christ are recognised.

JUDGES 19 TO 21

Judges 19; Judges 20; Judges 21

From the beginning of chapter 17 to the end of the book there are incidents which expose the moral state of the people of God in a very sad way. Perhaps the greater evil comes first, that is, the connecting of idolatry with the Name of Jehovah; that is the greatest evil possible, but it did not awaken anything like the indignation that was aroused in Israel by the moral corruption that came to light in Gibeah. There are things against which the natural conscience revolts, and everybody would rise up against them, but those are not the worst things. An offence directly against God in holy things is the worst possible evil. There was no gathering of all Israel from Dan to Beersheba in connection with idolatry in the house of Micah, furthered by a grandson of Moses. It might have been expected that such a thing would rouse all Israel as one man, but it did not.

This history shows that we are more likely to be roused by something that offends moral propriety than by something that touches directly the service and the glory of the Lord. The natural conscience can take account of the former, but it needs real love for God to feel deeply what sets God aside, and what is due to Himself among the people. What was done was very dreadful; it was the result, no doubt, of the association of the people with the Canaanites, and they had learned their abominable ways. It was, as Scripture says, "lewdness and villainy in Israel"; all that the people said about it was true. So they all assembled unto Jehovah in Mizpah and the gathering was spoken of as the congregation of the people of God. Dreadful as their state was, there was enough conscience left in them to be shocked at this gross wickedness. They used right terms about it. The Levite said, "They have committed lewdness and villainy *in Israel*", verse 6; and in the end of verse 10 the people said, "according to all the villainy that they have wrought *in Israel*", and in verse 13 they spoke of putting away evil "from Israel". But we often say right things without feeling them at all. They did not feel it as the sin of Israel, but as the sin of Gibeah. If they had felt it as the sin of Israel, they would all have been on their faces before God, confessing it as their own sin. They took it up in a way God could not support; they did not *feel* it, though they *said* what was right. There was a natural indignation about what was manifestly wicked, which was not the fruit of communion with God at all. There was no sign of their being humbled before God. They did not seek direction; they decided what they would do; they say. It cannot be tolerated; we must go and execute judgment on them at once. It was right, but they were not moving with God in it. So, while this evil was dealt with in faithfulness, yet it was only

through much chastisement that the people were brought into such a state that God could be with them in what they were doing. Even then they had to go through the deepest sorrow about it, and realise that the thing had been handled in such a way that they nearly lost a tribe out of Israel. They did not take it up as the sin of Israel; they might have learned from the case of Achan when Jehovah said, "*Israel* hath sinned", and He held all Israel responsible. It should have been taken up as an assembly exercise. If anything happens among the people of God that is unbecoming and offensive (there are some things offensive to the natural conscience), the first exercise should be that such a thing has transpired in *Israel*, so that it is for Israel to be humbled about it, to take up its shame and sorrow in deep humiliation with God. One can quite conceive that, if they had done so, it might have had a great effect on Benjamin; they would have said, Why, they are all breaking their hearts in sorrow about what we have done, and confessing our sin as if it had been their own! I think it would have touched them.

This is a very important consideration for us about all disciplinary action, that is, as to our condition of soul in dealing with it, whether we are really with God in dealing with it. When there is anything glaringly wrong it is easy to say it is wrong and must be judged, but am I really with God in doing it? This is a searching exercise for us, because it is easy to see ten thousand things that are wrong, and many that are grossly offensive, but how do we feel them? Paul says to the Corinthians, "Ye have not rather mourned", 1 Corinthians 5: 2. Even though they did not know how to deal with the wicked person, if they had mourned, the Lord would have dealt with him. Israel had to go through sorrow and very much exercise; they had to weep and fast, and bring burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and to recognise that after all Benjamin was their brother. Then they had to be severely chastened; 22,000 of them were killed in one day, and 18,000 on the next day. They were doing what was right, but God did not support their action. They were so indignant that they put themselves under a solemn oath to deal with it in the most drastic fashion, but they were not with God.

Then we see a very much worse condition in Benjamin. It was not the whole tribe that was guilty, but certain sons of Belial in a certain city; yet the whole tribe of Benjamin refused to judge the matter, and that was worse than the sin; to refuse to judge the evil is worse than the sin itself. Someone asked Mr. Darby how much evil would justify one in leaving a company of Christians, and he answered, No amount of evil would justify anyone in separating from any company of Christians, but the refusal to *judge* the least bit of evil would justify separation. It is important to understand that. Evil may come in anywhere, but, if it comes in, it must be judged. The holiness of God and the

righteousness of His throne demand judgment, and, if we refuse to judge, everything is forfeited. Benjamin refused to judge the evil; they would not deliver up these sons of Belial, so Benjamin came under the avenging stroke that was really divine justice.

There is twice an appeal to the whole company to deliberate and give counsel. It is sometimes easier to do that than to ask counsel of God. We do not find that they enquired before they decided their course. This represents a state of things, no doubt, very likely to be found in the last days of the church. There may be a certain indignation about that which is wrong, and faithful dealing with it, and yet it may not be handled in a spiritual way, and the result may be very solemn. It could never be the divine intent to blot out a tribe in Israel; that could never be God's thought.

We need more exercise about the state of things generally in Israel today so that we do not say *they*; we are apt to say, *he* or *she*, or *they*, but we must learn to say *we*. I feel it in myself that I can see many evils in the Christian profession, but I must confess that I do not find myself ready to bear the shame and sorrow as my own; and yet if I were with God I should. There is a path in the midst of all the corruption and evil which is the path of the just, but it does not put you outside Israel.

These seven hundred chosen men of Gibeah might have been saved to the people of God. There is often a refusal to judge things on the part of even chosen men. They are very accurate men too; they could sling stones at a hair and not miss. How sad that men like that should refuse to judge what is evil! It is sad to see better men than ourselves who are not prepared to judge what is manifestly evil. We ought to feel it. I have seen it — able men, accurate men, chosen men — the more excellent they are, the more we should feel it if they are not prepared to judge evil. We see earnest, devoted and godly men, not prepared to judge what is evil, and we ought to feel it much.

It was divine order that Judah should take the lead, but God did not support him. Israel had to be chastened by the loss of 22,000 men, and the next day by the loss of 18,000. It is not for us to question the disciplinary ways of God with His people. Judah's whole moral state was wrong, and so was the state of all Israel; their consciences were outraged at what had been done, but they were not feeling it as God would have them feel it. He had to chasten them till they did feel it, in measure, as God would have them feel it, and then God says, "I will give them into thy hand" (chapter 20: 28) and we find that *Jehovah* smote Benjamin before Israel, verse 35. He smote them in the end.

Self-righteousness can come in in a very subtle way, even in connection with the judgment of evil. If I am on the line of You are wrong, and I right, that is

pure self-righteousness, and that is just the point God had to bring the people to. They had to be brought to the house of God, to Bethel, to weep and fast, and offer burnt-offerings and peace offerings. They had to come to the foundation on which they stood with God, and the foundation on which they could go on with one another, and that is the death of Christ. It is not that Benjamin is wrong and I am right; that is not the point.

When they went to Phinehas they brought the burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. A remarkable cluster of ideas is brought forward; the ark of the covenant and Phinehas are there. Now Phinehas was a man who in his day executed summary judgment on what was evil. No man in Scripture was more noted than Phinehas for judgment of evil; he judged it unsparingly, but God says of him, "He was jealous with my jealousy", Numbers 22: 11. We have to be brought to this, that we are not jealous with natural indignation, but with God's jealousy. We have to ask when we judge any kind of evil, Is this my jealousy or God's? If we have God's jealousy we shall have a blessed sense of the burnt-offerings, the peace-offerings, and the ark of the covenant. These are fine things to take account of when any discipline is on hand. Phinehas had the covenant of the everlasting priesthood; he was entirely apart from any human motives; he took the javelin in his hand in jealousy for God; there was no natural indignation with him at all, but holy, priestly and spiritual indignation. We have to come to that. A man of the world can judge what is wrong, for men have their code of good and evil, but God says to His people, I want you to judge it with Me — I want you to be in communion with Me about it, and judge it far more deeply than you would judge it with your natural conscience. Paul was the Phinehas of the New Testament.

On what ground are we? If we are going on with God it is on the ground of the value of the burnt-offering; we are with God entirely on the ground of the death of Christ. We are with the brethren on the ground of the peace-offering; that is the death of Christ in another aspect. That preserves us from any feelings of self-righteousness when judging evil. If not, we shall have the spirit of self-righteousness; I should say, That brother is wrong, and I am right. God will not have that spirit. We have to learn that it is on the footing of Christ that we are with God, and with one another.

The ark brings us back to the true character of the dispensation that we are never to forget. We must not forget that the covenant is the basis of all; Christ is the ark of the covenant; every thought of God for blessing is secured in Christ.

I have often thought that it is remarkable that there is not a sin-offering here. I should have brought it in if it had been left to me, but, no, it is the burnt-

offering and the peace-offering; that is, it refers to the ground on which the people were with God; they are there, not blessed because of their faithfulness or righteousness, but because of Christ. Now, we have to retain that in all judgment of evil; that we do not think ourselves better than the people whom we have to judge. We are not on that ground with God at all. We are on the ground of Christ, and our fellowship together as saints is based on Christ and His death. We are right to judge what is evil, and separate, but it is not the basis of our communion. Christ is the basis of our communion. God has to bring the people to that ground by His chastisement, and then they move forward and execute a fearful judgment on Benjamin, so that the tribe is nearly blotted out, nearly exterminated, and the next chapter tells us that they repented concerning their brother Benjamin, and they had to weep and mourn before God over the fact that a tribe was lost, and was likely to be permanently lost in Israel. God would teach us that in having to separate from our brethren at a time of conflict. There is sometimes great zeal to maintain what is right, and a great deal of faithfulness, and we stand for God in a crisis, but perhaps the result is that we lose a great many brethren. Now do we feel it? Do we feel we have lost Benjamin? I do not think God allows us to go on without feeling that a tribe is lost. The result of the discipline had been to exterminate a tribe. If it had been handled in a more spiritual way there would have been a divine way of getting at it without losing a tribe.

I was speaking to one recently about a certain brother who had been withdrawn from, and I asked if there was any movement of recovery with him. He said, No; we have had to go through a great deal of exercise whether, if we had handled him in a more gracious way, he might have been saved. I was glad to hear that; it was a right exercise. The man was rightly judged, but afterwards the Lord put His people through this exercise. That is the exercise of the last chapter; they repented concerning their brother Benjamin. It was not that they had modified their judgment of evil, but they felt that they had lost their brother. How searching these exercises are! The people had sworn, they had taken an oath, and they had to abide by their oath. They had sworn that everybody that did not come up should be killed. They killed all the men of Jabesh-Gilead. It was right, but perhaps if they had been more spiritual they need not have sworn.

They had sworn they would not give their daughters to Benjamin. It looked like extreme faithfulness; it put them in a difficulty. The last chapter tells us of the difficulty they had in getting wives for the six hundred men of Benjamin so that a tribe should not be lost. What a dreadful thing it would have been if one stone had had to be torn out of the breastplate! Who could fancy the mutilation of the breastplate by a stone being torn out! When they came to

look at things according to God they could not bear to think of Benjamin being lost. It should be more of a real sorrow to have to part company with anyone we can recognise as a true saint. We may have to do it, but the question is, How do we face it? The lesson of this chapter is not as to righteousness; what they did was perfectly right, but what they did had not a divine savour, and they had to be made to feel that, in their zeal and faithfulness, they had nearly brought a disaster on Israel that could have been avoided, had they carried themselves through in a more spiritual manner. It was right that Benjamin should be smitten — but in what spirit is it to be done?

These closing chapters give us the moral state of Israel generally. It is not like a political history, under judges, but they are incidents brought in to show us the actual moral state of the people, how far they were from God, even in judging evil; they were doing what was right in their own eyes. All this is very exercising for us. This would not be put in God's word if we did not need it.

To take this home would prepare us to go on with Ruth. The book of Ruth shows us what is of God. He has shown us in Judges what failure there was everywhere among His people, but He reserves this beautiful book of Ruth as an appendix to show what was of Himself in the midst of it all.

RUTH 1

Ruth 1

We must all have noticed a striking contrast between the book of Judges and the one we have now before us. In Judges we see repeated departures of the people of God, and Jehovah's gracious intervention in raising up deliverers to relieve the oppression of His afflicted people. But we do not see anywhere in the book of Judges recovery to the normal enjoyment of the inheritance. The judges were not wholly types of Christ, even Gideon led the people into a snare. There are incidents in their history which may be viewed as typical of certain things connected with Christ, but the judges were marked by defects, though God used them as instruments to deliver His people in their generation. Not one of them was great enough to reinstate the people in the enjoyment of the inheritance according to God. But in the book of Ruth there is recovery of the inheritance. One is found great enough to exercise the right of redemption, to redeem the inheritance and to secure a seed to enjoy it. And there is a peculiarly attractive charm about the book which appeals even to those who are not able to perceive its spiritual import.

In the book of Judges not only did no redeemer appear great enough to restore fully according to God that which had been departed from, but, on the other hand, moral conditions suitable to divine recovery were not present in the people. What marks Judges is the statement that every man did what was right in his own eyes. There could be no true recovery or reinstatement in such a condition; and, alas! it is a condition that very largely bars the way to recovery of the inheritance at the present time amongst the people of God.

Movement on the line of recovery is brought about by such dealings of God as are seen in Ruth 1. Brokenness of spirit — a broken and contrite heart under the dealings of God — is an absolute necessity, and it is the preparation for all recovery. If we belonged to a profession that had not failed, and if we ourselves had not failed, there would be no such history as we see pictured in this chapter. But if it be true that we belong to a profession that has grievously failed and departed from God and lost the enjoyment of the inheritance, and we ourselves have so failed as to have personally contributed to the general state of departure, there is surely a loud call to humble ourselves in self-judgment before God.

There is nothing more common today than for people to assert that the churches are moving on, and that, indeed, things have greatly developed in a favourable direction. The false church says, "I sit a queen, and I am not a widow", Revelation 18:7. We are surrounded by the boastings of Laodicea. "I

am rich, and am grown rich, and have need of nothing". But the Lord says, "Thou art the wretched and the miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked", Revelation 3:17. If there is no sense of departure there will be no desire for recovery. But if under the dealings of God our true condition is brought home to us, and we are humble and contrite in heart, there is something that God can acknowledge and restore. We see this in Naomi.

Elimelech means, Whose God is King, and Naomi means, My pleasantness. They represent the original state of Israel as called of God into His favour. God acted in kingly power to bring to pass His own thought of blessing. Balaam said of Israel in his parable, "Jehovah his God is with him, and the shout of a king is in his midst". All through their history we can see that their God is King. Whether in His actings for them in Egypt, or in the wilderness, or His setting them in the land, all is the exercise of His kingly power. Then Naomi — my pleasantness — speaks of the people as a delight to God. That was how they came into the inheritance. God acted in kingly power doing everything for them, and on their side as responsive to Him in the bond of the covenant they were pleasant in His sight. That was their original status.

But what a change in the chapter before us! We see here God the King acting governmentally according to the sorrowful conditions which existed among His people. There are two sides to the truth of the kingdom. As the "King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible, only God" He acts to bring about the blessing of His people. But, on the other hand, His being King involves His government, and if conditions are present which are not pleasing to Him His governmental dealings in an adverse sense are inevitable. It was so in Israel; it is so in the assembly. Under the government of God there was famine even in Bethlehem — the house of bread — and Elimelech went out from the inheritance to sojourn in the fields of Moab. It is sad when there is famine in the place where we would most expect to find food. But the government of God acts inevitably and universally according to the conditions present in His people. How good it is to see, as in the history before us, that even the government of God eventually subserves the purposes of His grace.

Naomi found herself bereft both of her husband and her sons. Famine-stricken, an exile from the inheritance, widowed, empty of all but the sad memory of better and brighter days in the past! What a pathetic picture! "I am in much more bitterness than you; for the hand of Jehovah is gone out against me". "Call me not Naomi — call me Mara (Bitterness) for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and Jehovah has brought me home again empty. Why do ye call me Naomi, seeing Jehovah has brought me low, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

Under the dealings of God exercises were produced in the soul of Naomi — a deep sense of what had been lost, and of the hand of God upon her. Such exercises as these are necessary before restoration can come about. No doubt this book has reference to God's dealings with Israel. Israel at the present moment is impoverished, scattered far and wide from the inheritance, bereft of all divine support and consolation, and in a future day they will have to pass through even more intense sorrow and tribulation, but God will eventually use these things to bring them into such true contrition that He will be free to reinstate them in full blessing through Christ.

But if this book refers in a typical way to Israel's departure and restoration through Christ, the actings of grace which are brought out in such a sweet and touching way have their place also with saints who are of the assembly. The way of recovery is, in principle, the same for ourselves as for Israel. We cannot read the epistles without seeing how greatly the people of God in this period have departed from the truth, and lost the enjoyment of the inheritance that was freely given to them of God. The Lord's words to the assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3 have a solemn bearing on this. An urgent call to repentance appears in five of them. If we have not some sense of departure we shall not fully appreciate the grace of recovery which shines so brightly in the book of Ruth. Alas! we are so often occupied in seeking our own things, and doing it in such an individual and isolated way that we hardly realise how the people of God have lost the enjoyment of their divinely allotted portion.

Naomi sets forth the deep exercises which will be found in those who listen to the Lord's words to the assemblies, and who realise that they belong to a profession that has grievously failed, and that they are suffering the deprivation of much that was the enjoyed inheritance of saints at the beginning. The sad truth of the position was pressed home on the soul of Naomi; she was made to feel it deeply. Instead of the inheritance being abundantly fruitful in every good, it had ceased to yield its harvests. "There was a famine IN THE LAND". Strange and sad contrast to the fertility which had been pledged to obedient and faithful lovers of Jehovah!

For a Bethlehemite to be sojourning in the fields of Moab was far from the thoughts of God for His people. It was in itself the evidence that His people had departed from Him, and His blessing had been withdrawn from them. The inheritance had not only failed of the blessing of God, but they had left it, to go to a land whose inhabitants were of such a character under the eye of God that they were forbidden to come into His congregation; "even their tenth generation shall not come into the congregation of Jehovah for ever", Deuteronomy 23: 3.

But God's governmental dealings continued in the land of Moab. Elimelech died and also his two sons; no seed remained capable of taking up the inheritance. On the line of God's government all was lost, and there was no vestige of hope save in that pure sovereignty of goodness which caused God to act graciously for His people, not because of any deserving on their side, or any ability on their part to win back what had been departed from, but just because of what He was in Himself. It was wholly on this ground that Jehovah "visited his people to give them bread". And who could appreciate the tidings of this more than one who had learned in bitterness what it was to be alienated from the land, to be bereft and empty? Though Naomi was exiled, and bereft of all hope on the natural line, she still cherished Jehovah and the inheritance of Israel in her heart, so that as soon as she heard of His gracious visitation of His people it set her in movement. She yearned for good that had been known in the past; Jehovah and His land were still precious and attractive to her heart; and He honoured her by making her and her hopes attractive to Ruth. What came out in Ruth was the precious fruit, through divine working, of what she had learned of Jehovah through those who cherished His Name amidst sorrowful circumstances.

Ruth came in as having no claim at all, for she was a Moabitess, but as one who had learned that it was blessed to trust under the wings of the God of Israel. If God's own people had forfeited the inheritance through lack of love for Him there was encouragement to believe that even a Moabite who loved Him would be graciously received. He would welcome a lover whatever the past history of that lover might have been! She and Naomi were both widows; there was no seed to inherit; the succession had apparently hopelessly failed. Then what remained? The attraction of Jehovah, the link with His people, all that had been brought to her, and represented to her, by those who loved Jehovah, though in exile and bereavement under His hand.

Ruth was prepared to give up natural hopes in order to have part with the people of God even in sorrow and affliction. There were no outward prospects of any kind to attract her. Hers was a purely spiritual affection for that which in widowhood and sorrow had become more to her heart than the people and country and gods of Moab. Spiritual affections — awakened in a heart that had no claim of any kind — led her to breakaway from everything that was not of God, and to come to take refuge under His wings. In her father-in-law she had learned — may we not say? — how kingly was Israel's God, how far above the degraded Chemosh of the Moabites, whose worship consisted in the grossest impurities. In her husband Mahlon (mild) she had learned to appreciate a character which became more attractive to her than the arrogance of Moab (Isaiah 16: 6.) She had dealt kindly with the dead — evidently as appreciating

what was set forth in them — and this was a characteristic which only needed following up to bring her to full blessing. Then she had learned in Naomi how to value the God-given inheritance by seeing the deep exercises of one who had left it, and who was submitting in sorrow to the action of God's government, feeling the loss of the inheritance, but cherishing in her heart the thought of redemption. All this was binding her heart to Jehovah and to His people; it was forming her in new affections and desires, so that in the appreciation of what was of God she had really become a stranger in Moab.

Ruth's ardent affection knit her to what was of God, even when it was found in exercise and sorrow. Anything that is distinctively of God today will be found with those who are humble and contrite in heart, and who are marked by exercise and brokenness of spirit, for we are in a day of great departure and weakness and it is right to feel this. Have we kindly feelings towards what is of God? There is hope for love wherever it exists; a Moabite with love for Jehovah is infinitely better than an Israelite without it. Love gets wondrous things now. See John 14:15 - 23. The exercises of Naomi and the affections of Ruth were both found in the woman of Luke 7: 36 - 50 she "loved much"; she was not only a believer but a lover; it was love that brought her to the Pharisee's house and to the feet of Jesus; and how truly did she find in Him the "mighty man of wealth"!

Orpah is a solemn warning, for she seemed to make as good a start as Ruth, but the love that never fails was not there, and she stopped short and went back to her people and her gods; she missed all that Ruth got. We may be affected and moved to a certain extent by being in contact with the people of God, and yet, when it comes to a final test, we may go back. Orpah drew back to perdition, but Ruth, speaking typically, got eternal life.

It is well to remember that Ruth was not attracted first to Boaz, but to Naomi. It was not the "mighty man of wealth" that allured her from Moab to Bethlehem, but what she had learned of God from a poor widow sorrowing under the dealings of God, but cherishing her place amongst His people even in her days of departure and mourning. "Ruth clave to her". We have all been touched by the depth and sincerity of her declaration: "Do not intreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part me and thee", verses 16, 17. There was still "pleasantness" about Naomi to Ruth's heart, for she was a lover of Jehovah, and her heart was in Bethlehem though her steps had been for years in the far-off fields of Moab. If Ruth had not seen and been

attracted by what was of God in Naomi she would not have followed her from Moab to Bethlehem, and she would never have known Boaz, or been known by him. She reached Boaz as the result of being bound up in affection with what was of God as found in sorrow and weakness here. The things of God often come to us first in a very humble guise. Are those who love God attractive to us? Do we delight to go with them in their exercises, in their spiritual movements? If so we shall surely be brought to the true Boaz. Naomi represents that state of heart which takes account of all the departure from God's thoughts, and feels the sorrow of it. Speaking assembly-wise we can look back to the time when we had first-love and did first works, and enjoyed the inheritance; but we have to feel how different it is now. But God has gracious thoughts of recovery and restoration. This is necessarily an individual matter, but individual recovery always has in view, from God's side, recovery of assembly character. God does not despise anyone who feels things rightly before Him. He delights in recovery. The Christian profession, as a whole, will end its course in apostasy, but there are those who, like Naomi, feel the state of things, and in Ruth we see sensibilities that are awakened to appreciate what is of God by coming in contact with them. Ruth's heart was open to the spiritual impressions that reached her. How suitable is all this in view of recovery to what is in God's mind for His people!

Sorrowful exercises in Naomi and ardent affection in Ruth moved together from the fields of Moab and came to Bethlehem. But we must not forget that what started the movement was neither in Naomi nor in Ruth, but in Jehovah. "Jehovah had visited his people to give them bread". It was the report of this that set them in motion. And there is a similar grace on His part today. The departure is manifest, and it is right to feel it, but the thoughts of God are unchanged, and the inheritance is as much in His heart for His people as it ever was. And in these last days God has, indeed, visited His people to give them bread. It is a time of extraordinary contrasts. On one side there is lack of spirituality, worldliness, self-seeking, every man doing what is right in his own eyes. But on another side wonderful and blessed divine movements. It would hardly be saying too much if we affirmed that there is more bread available for the people of God today than there has been at any time since the days of the apostles. The question for each one of us is, Are we interested? Is the inheritance, and the bread divinely given, attractive enough to draw us out of Moab, and to bring us to Bethlehem? If so, we shall find that it is "the beginning of the barley harvest". The barley harvest is figurative of what is connected with Christ as the risen One. God is giving to His people what is precious and nourishing. As the Sheaf of first-fruits, Christ has been waved in resurrection, and what is secured in Him lies outside the region of either

individual failure or assembly failure. It is all the product of divine grace and working. Christ is, indeed, the Mighty Man of wealth; He is the true Boaz — in Him is strength. We find afterwards that Ruth kept with the maidens of Boaz until the end of the wheat harvest; the wheat harvest has reference to the saints as after the order of Christ; it brings in, typically, the assembly.

RUTH 2

Ruth 2

It is important for the good and joy of our souls that we should apprehend Christ in a definite and personal way as the Kinsman who has the right of redemption. He is the Kinsman, in infinite grace, of every soul that is exercised in the fear of God. Wherever there is the true owning of the rights of God, Christ can be claimed as Kinsman. Elimelech being dead, and Mahlon and Chilion being dead also, made it clear that they could not take up the inheritance. Everything was hopeless unless there should be one with the right of redemption, and with willingness and ability to exercise that right. The hopelessness of everything on man's side is set forth in the death of the three men; the exercises that are becoming under such circumstances are seen in Naomi; divinely awakened interest and desire appear in Ruth. But the meeting of those exercises, and the satisfaction of those desires, is seen to depend on the kinsman with the right of redemption. It is a beautiful picture of how Israel will be shut up to Christ to secure all that is in their inheritance, and it is not less beautiful as portraying how — notwithstanding individual and collective failure — the inheritance can be enjoyed today.

God would call our attention to One who holds and enjoys all that is the portion of man according to the thoughts of divine love. A living glorious Man at the right hand of God is in possession of all that it was in divine purpose to bestow upon men, and He is such a Kinsman with the right of redemption that He can bring us into it. All the wealth and blessedness of what God has purposed for men as the subjects of His love and calling, is substantiated in Christ as the risen and glorified One, and eternally secured there. In being brought to Christ we are brought to the true Boaz, in whom is strength to hold all that God would give to men, and who holds it in such a way that it becomes available for us. He has "the right of our redemption". This applies particularly to a day when the divinely allotted portion has been lost as to present enjoyment. For that is the point of view in the book of Ruth.

It comes to light that Naomi has "a relation of her husband's", and though SHE was impoverished, HE was "a mighty man of wealth". This brings out, typically, the place which Christ has taken in relation to "the seed of Abraham", who are spoken of as "the children", and as His "brethren". See Hebrews 2: 11 - 16. Those who fear God, and love Him, and desire His blessing, find that they have a Kinsman who has the right of redemption. There is One who restores that which He took not away, and who has the right and ability to reinstate in the inheritance those who have forfeited it. When He was here He found a

company of persons going to John to be baptised, confessing their sins. He would be Kinsman to such, He would go that way with them; they were to Him "the saints that are on the earth" and "the excellent". His delight was in them.

An interesting feature of this beautiful history is that the initiative is taken by Ruth. She finds Boaz by the diligence with which she sought to become possessed of some of the good with which God was favouring His people. It was one of the provisions of God's grace that there should be something for a gleaner. See Deuteronomy 24: 19 - 21. He thought, too, in this connection, of "the stranger", as well as the fatherless and the widow. Ruth in proposing to go and glean showed that she had laid hold of the thoughts of divine favour which were in the heart of the God of Israel towards even a "stranger". She wanted what was of the inheritance, even if only as a gleaner. And we have ALL to come in as gleaners in the first place. That is, we have no rights of proprietorship, or any title or claim save that which divine favour gives. Ruth proposed to glean "after him in whose sight I shall find favour",

verse 2. She knew enough of God to confidently count upon favour. This is a blessed state of heart. Not saying, I am unworthy, and therefore I must not presume to glean in the inheritance of the people of God. But counting upon favour, even if consciously unworthy. And, in a beautiful spirit of subjection, submitting her exercises to Naomi. She would not act independently of the one who had brought divine and spiritual influences to bear upon her. There is no surer mark of a work of God than the spirit of subjection, and subjection is easy when affection rules. Naomi represents the moral exercises that are suitable in a day and state of departure, and love that desires spiritual good will never be disregarding of such exercises, but will move in accord with them.

Opportunities to make personal acquaintance with Christ are found as we move, like Ruth, on the line of desire and diligence and affection and subjection. If such features mark us we shall light on the portion of field which belongs to Christ, and we shall come under His personal notice. The presence and blessing of God are there (verse 4), and they are available for all who desire and seek them. Ruth came under the notice of Boaz as one who was truly and diligently interested in the favour which God was showing to His people. She was only a humble gleaner, but she was gleaning in the divine inheritance, and in a field which belonged to a kinsman who had the right of redemption.

"And Boaz said to his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose maiden is this?" verse 5. Christ observes every humble gleaner in His field. We need not expect to come under the notice of Christ by choosing the company of the

unspiritual by reading worldly books, or conversing on worldly topics. Those allotments are not His field, But when Ephraim says, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Jehovah says, "I answer him, and I will observe him", Hosea 14: 8. And Jesus said to Nathanael, "When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee", John 1: 48. How good to be moving in such a way that we attract the attention of Christ! We see typically in this chapter a state of soul that appeals powerfully to His heart. When you are in your chamber crying to God to increase your knowledge of Himself, and to show you more of the preciousness of Christ, to give you more of the wealth of the inheritance, you come under the personal notice of divine Persons. How favourably does Christ regard a soul who would rather have Him, and the blessing of God in Him, than all the wealth and honour or good that the world can offer! He says of such, "I will observe him". The book of Ruth is largely a history, typically, of movements of affection on our side, and of diligence in the pursuit of what is spiritual.

Ruth was not only a gleaner of the blessing of God, but a diligent gleaner. "She came, and has continued from the morning until now; her sitting in the house has been little as yet", verse 7. I have no doubt the Spirit reports to Christ just how we are acting with reference to His things — the true measure of our interest and diligence. I have found that even a small measure of interest in God's things secures blessing, and perhaps none of us knows what wealth we might have secured if we had manifested greater diligence in the pursuit of spiritual things.

We may glean in all that belongs to Christ. Ruth gets every encouragement from Boaz and his servants. He speaks directly to her for personal comfort (verse 8). He encourages her to continue and "not to glean in another field". He says, "Let thine eyes be on the field which is being reaped, and go thou after them". The Lord loves to be recognised as the Director of operations in His own fields, and wherever His young men and maidens are at work is the place to keep our eyes on. It is good to follow up the reaping and the gleaning of the present day. The wealth of the inheritance is being reaped today in mutual co-operation; the young men and the maidens are working together. The young men represent the energy that apprehends spiritual things and makes the good of the inheritance available. This was seen in the apostles first, and it is seen in a subordinate degree in all the gifts of the ascended Christ. The maidens would represent a subjective state that follows up what is ministered, and seeks through exercise that it shall be formative in us. It is good to be in company with that.

Ruth was made welcome to glean, and to drink of what the young men drew. This latter, as being in “vessels”, would appear to typify what is standing ready to be used at any time for spiritual refreshment. The Holy Scriptures take the first place as such a store, and there is also much that is permanently available in the way of printed ministry. There are vessels from which we are welcome to drink, and which are open to be used by every humble Ruth who gleans in the field of the true Boaz. Indeed, the whole wealth of the inheritance is open to us as when the Holy Spirit came down from a glorified Christ. Love can have everything. The last verse of the epistle to the Ephesians — which is the epistle of our inheritance — intimates to us that love gives access to everything. “Grace with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption”.

Ruth’s own feeling was that she was a stranger (verse 10), but to the eye of Boaz her affectionate link with what was new to her was her distinguishing feature. She had severed herself from what was of Moab, and had identified herself with what was of God, though she had only known it in exile. She had been moved in heart to come and take refuge under the wings of Jehovah; Boaz had pleasure in her; she obtained personal recognition from him. It is a precious moment in the soul’s history when we have the consciousness for the first time of Christ’s personal recognition, and can say, I am altogether unworthy, but I desire the blessing of God, and the Lord has taken knowledge of me! As Naomi said, “Blessed be he that did regard thee”, verse 19. Ruth got direct comfort from Boaz as he spoke to her heart, though she had a deep sense that she was not like one of his hand-maidens.

Then “mealtime” comes (verse 14), and it brings special marks of favour. Boaz provides for his young men and maidens, and Ruth learns how he cares for them, and what provision his wealth affords. But what THEY have SHE can have; his heart and his hand are as open to her as to them, all unworthy as she felt herself to be. It was all HIS favour — the thoughts of His heart. There is such a thing as “mealtime” now, when the reapers and the maidens sit down to eat and to drink. It speaks of the fellowship that is available through the grace of our Lord. No one comes spiritually into it save by His invitation. Many stand off as feeling unworthy, but this is, at the bottom, unreadiness to owe all to Him. In partaking of what HE provides, the humblest self-judged soul can sit, by His invitation, beside the reapers. Such have equal right with the greatest labourers in His harvest, for it is the right of Christ to call them all to partake of what His grace gives. So, after Pentecost, “they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles”. They all “sat beside the reapers”, and they knew something of what it was to receive “parched corn” from the hand of a risen and exalted Christ, for it was Himself in heaven who had now

become their food. The history of Ruth shows how a soul comes into fellowship as led by affectionate desires, and as welcomed by the Lord Himself.

The bread and the vinegar represent what can be enjoyed in common in Christian fellowship. There is a portion covered by the term "the Lord's table" of which it is our privilege to partake; it is provided for all His saints.

Practically, as to enjoyment, it is only reached as we, like Ruth, choose the good part. At the present day things are reached experimentally by way of love that seeks them. This is illustrated in the two who heard John speak, and who followed Jesus. He said to them, "What seek ye? And they said to him, Rabbi ... where abidest thou? He says to them, Come and see", John 1: 38, 39.

The "parched corn" of verse 14, and the ears drawn out, of verse 16, represent what is in excess of the general supply; they are marks of personal favour. Every Ruth will get something that is not quite of a general character. The fellowship is general, but manifestations of the Lord are personal; it is the lover who gets them; John 14. There are many sweet expressions of the Lord's favour which are not general. For instance, the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1: 19) is only known to the one who gets it. "The Lord stood with me, and gave me power", (2 Timothy 4: 17) was very personal to Paul, and so was "My grace suffices thee", 2 Corinthians 12: 9. And the Lord speaks of a "white stone" and on it a "new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it", Revelation 2: 17. The Lord loves to give personal marks of favour and support. Such do not remain solely in result for our own enjoyment. Ruth ate the parched corn "and was sufficed, and reserved some" which she took home to her mother-in-law. Paul's experiences of personal favour were a great encouragement to him in his soul and service, but he has spoken of them to encourage us, and that we might look for personal favours also. We should covet to receive marks of the love and favour of Christ, so that the sense of His personal regard is in our hearts; we are not sustained altogether by what is general, but we have our personal secret with Him. The tendency is to live solely upon what is general, but love would not be satisfied with this; it appreciates what is general, but it has its own special delight in what is given as personal favour.

Ruth gleaned, and she beat out what she had gleaned. She was marked by intense diligence in the acquisition of all that grace put within her reach. And then she learned that Boaz was "near of kin", and that he was one who had the right of redemption. The one who had so graciously regarded her, and shown his personal favour to her, was one who had right to secure everything

for her that her heart desired. She was now getting, typically, an enlarged view of Christ — a dawning apprehension of the possibility of a more intimate personal link with Him than she had ever contemplated.

The great thought that underlies the book of Ruth is that spiritual affections are brought into rest; satisfied love is the subject of the book. Both Ruth and Boaz were brought to rest through realising the thoughts of God as set forth in Leviticus 25: 25 - 27 and Deuteronomy 25: 5, 6. God's love would not be in rest if what He has given were not enjoyed. Hence if poverty or death came in on the heirs, God had a reserve in the Kinsman-redeemer. He foresaw all that would come in, and Christ was His provision to meet it all. The inheritance was there, but in the mind of God it could only be taken up as redeemed. Naomi had no seed to inherit; her sons were dead; Israel was truly in that case morally as having no spiritual seed suitable to take up what was in the mind of God. Ruth, though a Moabitess, was the representative of the dead, but she could not claim the inheritance in her own right, nor secure a seed to hold it on behalf of her dead husband. If taken up at all the inheritance had to be taken up according to the ancient statute of the right of redemption. Israel never truly had the inheritance in any other way, and never will have.

This is a principle on which all can be secured that is for the pleasure of God and for the blessing of men, in spite of the fact that all has been departed from and forfeited on man's side. The right of redemption, as vested in Christ, will secure the reinstatement of Israel in a coming day when such exercises as were seen in Naomi, and such interest as was seen in Ruth, get a place with them. When the remnant commit themselves to Christ as Ruth did to Boaz He will exercise the right of redemption, and there will be a seed suited to inherit the promises. On the line of the natural all hope is dead, but through Christ all will be secured in a spiritual way for the glory of God. "He shall see a seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand", Isaiah 53: 10.

RUTH 3

Ruth 3

The conduct of Ruth in chapter 3 represents that of souls who have learned that all depends on Christ exercising in favour and power the right of redemption. She came, encouraged by the favour shown her, and by Naomi, to claim that he should exercise that right on her behalf. She would avail herself of God's provision in grace, conscious that as towards her all was unmerited favour, but yet having the moral suitability of "a woman of worth"; this was known in all "the gate of my people", verse 11. She came to Boaz as "winnowing barley in the threshing-floor", reminding us of Him "whose winnowing fan is in his hand, and he shall thoroughly purge his threshing-floor", Matthew 3: 12. He will get rid of all chaff; He will burn it with fire unquenchable; what is morally worthless will have no place with Him. It is better to be winnowed by Christ than to be sifted by Satan. Christ winnows to get rid of the chaff; Satan sifts that, if possible, he may get rid of the wheat. A "woman of worth" would come to light as being prepared to face all that is involved in the winnowing process, and such would be acceptable in His sight. Christ would displace all that is unsuitable to Himself. There may be a good deal that seems to be suitable, but when tested under threshing it is found to be but chaff which has to be eliminated. Ruth represents one who is prepared to be winnowed. And on her side, as washed, anointed, and robed, there were suitable moral conditions. For all such He can be counted upon to "shew thee what thou shalt do", and to "complete the matter this day".

It is striking that, as we have before remarked, Ruth takes the initiative in all this. The Spirit of God would bring prominently before us the fruit of His working, in that she moved affectionately and diligently after what was of God, and to acquire for herself all that was available through His favour. Spiritual things are available today; Christ is available, the Holy Spirit is available, the inheritance is available; in a certain sense we may say that the assembly is available. Now have we the state of heart seen in Ruth which will go in wholeheartedly for all that is available? Christ would say to us, "I love those that love me; and they that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; durable wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than fine gold, yea, than pure gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I walk in the path of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasuries", Proverbs 8: 17 - 21.

Lowliness, subjection and modesty were seen in Ruth; she had beautiful moral qualities, but, withal, a state of heart that would miss nothing which divine goodness and wealth put within her reach. She got every encouragement from Boaz. "And now, my daughter, fear not; all that thou sayest will I do to thee"; and he gave her six measures of barley. She returned to Naomi enriched, and with evidence that she had his full approval in what she was pursuing. It is a comfort to know that the Lord Jesus recognises every spiritual desire, even in one who is not yet in full rest and liberty. Do you think it is nothing to Christ if one can really say, "I delight in the law of God according to the inward man?" How much more if there is distinct desire for Himself? To such a one He would give a distinct expression of His interest and concern, and a pledge that He will see the matter through. Such may be learning and feeling that they have no rights and no power, but the Lord has His eye upon them, and He will surely see the matter through, and bring their exercises to fruition. When we have no one before us but Christ, He says, "I will do everything for you".

When Ruth learned that the one who had been so gracious to her was a kinsman with the right of redemption she was encouraged to put herself in the place of one who needed him, and who desired to be under his wing. She had then no more to do in the matter; it all rested with him. "Be still, my daughter ... for the man will not rest until he have completed the matter this day". When a divinely taught soul has its affections powerfully drawn to what is of God, and has come to the apprehension of Christ as the Kinsman with the right of redemption, and is ready to avail itself of Him, the whole matter then rests with Him. Everything must be taken up in such a way that the honour of it belongs alone to Christ. He will act for those who love Him, and secure to them all that their hearts desire, even at such a time as we are living in. When affections move simply and whole-heartedly towards Christ He undertakes everything.

RUTH 4

Ruth 4

But then we have to learn that nothing but Christ and a definite personal link with Him, will avail. We have to learn under divine teaching the utter inadequacy of the legal principle, and this is brought out typically in chapter 4. Man has the knowledge of good and evil, and conscience applies this to responsibility. Every man knows he ought to do what is good, and not to do what is evil. The law put that into formal shape, and held men definitely responsible to God for their actions and even their desires. This is represented by the one who had the prior claim in the case of Ruth; the law is nearer to us naturally than Christ. It is true that Gentiles have never been put under the law by God, but obligation to do what is right is upon all men by the knowledge of good and evil, and by conscience. Many of us have the light of Christianity as the standard of what we ought to be and do. The natural man would say, That is quite enough. Many would tell us we have only to use our inward perceptions and keep a good conscience, and we shall be all right! But we have to learn that we have no power. The law, or any kind of obligation you can think of, cannot undertake to meet conditions which are exactly opposite to what they ought to be. That principle cannot do anything for a dead man so that his name shall be raised up upon his inheritance. If death has come in, the raising up of the name of the dead involves a power of life in Another on his behalf which is, typically, resurrection power, and it is such power that is in Christ as the true Boaz. The object of the statute in Deuteronomy 25: 5, 6, was that the inheritance might be secured to one upon whom death had come, "that his name be not blotted out from Israel". This was pure grace acting in regard of one dead; the legal principle could do nothing in such a case. So the nearest kinsman — representing the law, or the legal principle — says, twice over, "I cannot redeem it". He drew off his sandal, as much as to say, I have no standing in such a case as this; I must give place to another.

Every one of us has to learn this lesson. The early part of Romans 7 gives the solution of the problem before showing us in detail in the latter part what the problem is; it is like a boy being given the answer to a sum before he is set to work it out. That is how grace would help us; we are shown that we have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, so that we might be to Another, even to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we may bear fruit to God. Then we are shown what bondage it is to be married to the first husband. Abigail had a similar exercise in getting freed, first in spirit and then

actually, from a husband who was incapable of being what her heart needed, in order to be linked with one who was a satisfying husband.

The nearer kinsman could not undertake what was really needed; he could not take up Ruth, nor bring in a seed to inherit when death had come in. I may feel as a Christian that my ways and spirit should be this or that, but this does not give power. Power is in Christ; without Him we can do nothing, but having Him there is sufficiency to achieve everything.

The gate of the city would suggest a definite public witness to what Christ has become to those who love Him. There are no people in the world so much observed as Christians; they are in the "gate"; the eyes of the world are fixed on them. Do they see clearly that we have a mighty and wealthy Husband — One who has set us in rest from selfishness, worldliness, and earthly mindedness, so that servants and worshippers of God are really brought forth?

Boaz is a type of Christ as risen. He alone, in the true and divine sense, has the right of redemption. He has secured the inheritance, not only by personal title as the Heir, but in view of our having it with Him He has established a title by purchase; it is an "acquired possession", Ephesians 1: 14. He holds it by an unquestionable title for He has discharged every claim upon it and made it His own. The precious thoughts of divine love in all their fulness could not be held by any other; in this regard Israel, and the Gentiles too, are "the dead". If their names are raised up upon the inheritance it must be in virtue of the power of life in Another which acts in grace towards them. All that God has in love purposed for man is held by Christ in the strength of resurrection, and it becomes the portion of those who, like Ruth, come to Him, and are married to Him. "The sure mercies of David" are the wealth and fatness of the inheritance, and they are all secured in Christ risen.

When the remnant of Israel find death upon them they will go through the bitterness that Naomi knew, and this will be accompanied by affectionate desires after Jehovah such as were seen in Ruth, but both will find their satisfying answer in being brought to their Messiah, known as having been in death for them, but now in risen strength to hold everything from God for them.

And if, like Israel, the saints of the present period have lost the possession and enjoyment of their God-given portion, the way is open for Naomis and Ruths to return, and to find that a Kinsman lives who delights to secure to them in Himself as risen and glorified all the wealth that they have departed from. This book belongs to the time of the judges; that is, it stands in relation to a time of failure and departure. It shows how love will reach Christ and find Him sufficient for everything — sufficient to secure the enjoyment of the

inheritance for us, sufficient to answer perfectly every affectionate desire for what is of God, sufficient, by giving us the Spirit, to constitute us suitable heirs. In Romans 8 we see that saints are suitable to inherit; they are sons and children, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ; the living seed is there. Estates fall into Chancery when there is no heir whose title can be established. Without heirs the inheritance would lapse; God's thought would be invalidated. This could never be, and the effect of reaching Christ as the true Boaz, and being married to Him, is that a seed is secured that is not under death, but which is capable of enjoying the inheritance. A son is born (chapter 4: 13) who has the right of redemption, for the women said, "Blessed be Jehovah who hath not left thee this day without one that has the right of redemption, and may his name be famous in Israel", verse 14. This refers to Obed, the son brought forth. It is a beautiful and interesting suggestion; the right of redemption is clearly viewed in two different ways. As attaching to Boaz it is typical of what is available in Christ as the Kinsman. But as attaching to Obed (Worshipper or Servant) it is typical of what comes to pass in the saints as the result of being brought in affection to Christ, and married to Him according to Romans 7: 4. The right of redemption becomes practically valid in the saints as they bring forth fruit to God in service and worship. Not only are things secured on God's side in Christ, but He brings about conditions on our side that are suitable in living heirs. A seed comes in that has manifestly right to the inheritance, having such a character as the children of God that they are suitable to be His heirs and Christ's joint-heirs. This is the result of the work of God in His saints; it is brought out, as to the teaching of it, in Romans 8.

I do not doubt that the Spirit of God would give present application to the teaching of this book. The general state of things today is the evidence that the people of God are in the fields of Moab rather than in Bethlehem. Death has come in, for the Lord says to Protestantism, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead", Revelation 3: 1. But Christ is great enough to bring in life where death has been. If God has assigned a portion to His saints He is glorified in their being in possession of it, and enjoying it, and bringing forth its fruits. He is not glorified by there being famine in the land, and by His people being in Moab. Such a state of things is to say publicly that Moab is a better place than Canaan! When Christians turn to the world and to earthly things their condition is such as to say publicly that these things are better than what God gives. I am sure that none of us would like to continue to give such a testimony as that.

But through the rich grace of our God there is opportunity for any who are in such a condition to feel it and own it, as Naomi did. And if hearts are attracted to the blessing of God as Ruth's was the result will be that Christ will be known

and reached as the Mighty Man of wealth. He will be known as the source of everything, the Restorer of all that was in God's original thought for His people, for all is secured and maintained in Him. And as saints abide in Him they become capable of taking up the inheritance. If Christ is in the saints, and the Spirit is life, the right of redemption is secured morally in them.

The reason why many fail to enjoy the inheritance is that they have never realised that they are not enjoying it; they lack the deep exercises seen in Naomi. Their spiritual standard is low; they believe that their sins are forgiven, and that they will go to heaven when they die or when the Lord comes, but they have very little conception that there is a vast wealth of spiritual blessing which they might be enjoying now. On the other hand, how often is there a lack of affectionate interest in God's things such as was seen in Ruth. She had never personally been in the land, so that she could not have quite the sense of having departed from it. Perhaps many of us have opportunity to come into things as she did. Under the influence of Naomi her affections went out fully to what was of God. If this is so with us it will lead to reaching Him who can fully secure to us the blessedness of the inheritance. There is often desire at the bottom of the heart, but no definite purpose to go in for what is desired, and when this is the case there is danger of being diverted by all kinds of things that are not Christ.

When a personal link is established with Christ known as the Kinsman with the right of redemption the result will be a seed that is spiritually capable of entering upon and enjoying the inheritance. All is secured for possession and enjoyment on the principle of pure divine favour, and a raising up in resurrection power. This is the product of such exercises as are set forth in Naomi; the son is said to be born to Naomi. But it comes in also in answer to such affections and desires as are seen in Ruth.

Then Obed begets Jesse — Jah exists; we are brought into the changeless certainty of all the things which are of God. And it only remains that Christ shall come as the true David to publicly introduce the rights of God as King, and to give the heirs of promise their full place in the inheritance as known in conditions of glory.