

Gideon 1

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the portion of the right of God's word in the Old Testament, the book of Judges, chapter 2.

And we'll take as the connecting link, verse 5. And they called the name of that place Bocam, and they sacrificed there unto the Lord.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, and in chapter 11, where the writer is cataloguing the great men and women of faith in the Old Testament, he says in verse 32, and what more shall I say?

For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, of Barak, of Samson, of Jephthah, who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

These four names, Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, are four of the twelve judges of whom this book speaks.

[1 : 59] And for some time I've wanted to make a study of the judges, something I've never done before or attempted, and perhaps for the next few weeks leading up to Communion, I would like to study with you these great names referred to in that version, Hebrews 11.

And this addressed night will be by way of introducing these studies. The book of Judges probably is one of the least read in all the Bible, and I think that it is probably one to which we as ministers seldom turn for texts and passages.

It deals with that period between the death of Joshua and the anointing of the first king of Israel, Saul.

And it is during that period that Paul refers, it's to that period that Paul refers in Acts chapter 13, I think, verse 28, when he says of that period in Israel's history that the Lord gave them judges. It covers a period of 450 years. And as I said, it gives us an account of 12 of these judges.

[3 : 46] The last recorded scene in the life of Joshua is in chapter 24 of the book that bears his name.

And as someone has said, it is a scene of singular grandeur. Joshua called the nation, the representatives of the nation, before him to a place called Shechem.

Now, those of you who know your Old Testament history will know that that is our name of hallowed associations.

It was in Shechem that Abraham erected the first altar to God when, in response to God's call, he left Mesopotamia and came into the, he left Paddan Aram and came into the promised land.

It was in Shechem that Jacob bought a piece of ground, a section of the land there, and after many years of his own exile in Paddan Aram.

[5 : 04] And it was at Shechem that Moses commanded the children of Israel to build an altar after they had, that Joshua commanded them to build an altar after they had crossed over the Jordan.

And here now is the same place where Joshua gathers the representatives of the nation prior to his own death.

And what Joshua does is this. And this very often happened when the great men of God died, Moses, for example, and Joseph and Jacob. He recalled in their presence God's gracious dealings with them as a people.

Ever since he had called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees right through the years, till he had delivered them from Egypt, led them into the wilderness and through the right sea, across the Jordan, and into the possession of the promised land.

And he recalls God's gracious dealings with them. He reminds them of what God had done in their interests all these years and on their behalf.

[6 : 24] Now they were in possession of the land which had been promised to Abraham hundreds of years before. And in his address, three times he calls the people to serve the Lord.

And three times they respond with a promise. We will serve the Lord. And in many respects it is difficult for us to understand how they could have done other than that.

He's gathered especially at such a hallowed place with so many associations in the history of this people.

How could they set someone standing there in Shechem, the site of Abraham's altar, the site of Jacob's well, of Joseph's tomb, and of Joshua's victories.

How could they refuse to believe in the divine calling of the people of Israel? So, prior to his death, he calls them to the service of God and they respond.

[7 : 35] And then Joshua died. And we write in this chapter, chapter 2, that during Joshua's day the people were faithful to the Lord. And during the next generation, those who succeeded Joshua, those who were elders with Joshua, as long as they survived, the people served the Lord.

But, with the rise of another generation, things began to change for the worse. And what happened was this, and this really is the background to our understanding of the lives of these judges in Israel. What happened was this. God had instructed Moses to enter in and to possess the land of Canaan. Of course, Moses himself didn't enter in.

Joshua led the people into Canaan. And the borders of their inheritance were very clearly marked out for them by God.

And when they entered Canaan, they took possession bit by bit of that land. But, and if you read Judges chapter 1, you will see this.

[9 : 03] As they progressed, as they pushed inward and onward, they stopped short of their allotted a piece of territory.

They failed. They failed. They failed. And this is what Judges tells us in chapter 1. They failed to destroy the Canaanites.

They failed to take complete possession of the land. They allowed some of these people to inherit the land with them.

Indeed, they entered into associations with them, into leagues with these people. They lived shoulder by shoulder with them, and shoulder to shoulder with them.

And as a matter of fact, in some instances, they allowed the people to retain all the territory as long as they paid them the Israelites' taxes for that land that they were allowed to possess.

[10 : 08] That's what happened. And because of that, we'll see in a minute, there's an act of disobedience. Because of that, after Joshua's death, and after the death of the men of his generation, the Canaanites began to reorganize themselves.

And they gathered their forces together. They became stronger and stronger and stronger. And now, they were becoming a real force to reckon with in the presence of the Israelites.

And so the Israelites called, and you'll find this in chapter 1, they cried to the Lord and they said, what shall we do? And the Lord gave them this answer, I'll tell you what to do.

We are not told how the Lord answered them, but just that he answered them. And he gave this command that the tribe of Judah was to act in the name of Israel and to go on and possess the rest of Canaan.

And for some glorious years of victory, Judah, in the name of Israel, pressed onward and amassed as much of the territory, almost as much of the territory as they were commanded to by God.

[11 : 34] But then they too stopped short. And the other tribes of Israel, as they took up the call to arms, they moved on, defeated so many of the Canaanites.

But again, they all stopped short of the total subjugation of their enemies in Canaan.

Now, what we have to remember is this, and I've hinted at this already. God had demanded the total destruction of these enemies.

But the Israelites failed in their obedience to that command. And someone summing up the situation has put it like this.

Their annals record a series of failures, all traceable more or less to unbelief. These failures, as the angel at Bochum told them, these failures laid a foundation for the miseries and the misfortunes of succeeding generations, while indirectly they led to the raising up of these mighty men of faith, the judges of Israel.

[12 : 51] Israel. Now, I just want to highlight for you one area in which Israel's unbelief came to land.

Israel, as a nation militarily, were a nation of infantry. Many of the Canaanites had weapons of war. However, they had, for example, horses and chariots, just as the Egyptians had. Now, as you read the history of Israel's conquests, you will discover this, that when in a conflict based on infantry strategy, they would overcome any enemy.

When they came face to face with chariots and horses, they weren't so sure of themselves. Now, you may say, well, surely you can't lay that to their charge.

But the point is this, that God had expressly told them, and you find this recorded in Deuteronomy, that they were not to be afraid of horses and chariots, that he would fight for them, and that in that strength they would overcome the horses and the chariots.

[14 : 11] But Israel failed to put that promise into effect. And whenever they came face to face with horsemen and chariots, in most instances in Canaan, they succumbed.

And that is why they became known. And you remember this. 500 years after this, when the Assyrians were trying to overcome Israel, you remember one of the things that they said.

The Israelites, they said, they fight well in the hills and the mountains, but they don't fight so well in the valleys. Their gods are the gods of the hills, but not the gods of the valleys.

And if we take them on in the valley, we will overcome. And all that stemmed from Israel's unbelief. God told them, you take them on and I'm with you.

But they wouldn't. And they failed to drive out many of these heathen enemies in Canaan.

[15 : 19] And so, this failure to drive them out, the compromise that they made with them, comes into bold relief in the history of the tribe of Ephraim.

And you have this recorded in the prophecy of Hosea. This is what happened. Because Ephraim failed to drive out these heathen, because they lived shoulder to shoulder with them, because ultimately they compromised.

They adopted and adopted their own practices. They became idol worshippers like these heathen, until eventually you have this said of Ephraim.

Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone. And that gives us the background to this great assembly that we have recorded for us here at Bochum in Judges chapter 2.

Now, what happened was this. The angel of the Lord came. Let me read this verse to you again. Chapter 2, verse 1.

[16 : 27] The angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochum and said, I made you go up out of Egypt and have brought you into the land where I swear unto your fathers.

But ye have not obeyed my voice. Why have ye done this? Now, Bochum is referred to as, the meaning of Bochum is the place of weeping.

And the Israelites wept bitterly at this place because the angel of the covenant, that is, the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ, revealing himself in a way in which he could be identified.

The Lord Jesus Christ came personally and spoke to these people. and he came from Gilgal, which was the first halting place in Canaan after their 40-year march in the wilderness and the crossing of the Jordan.

And he came from the place where they had kept the Passover for the first time. He came from there and now he speaks to them at Bochum. And during the intervening years, a dreadful spiritual declension had taken place in the lives of these people.

[17 : 54] He reminds them of his power exercising their interest years and years ago. He reminds them of their unfaithfulness, their forgetfulness, their disobedience. He threatens to leave them exposed to their enemies as justicemen.

They will be as thorns on your sides and they will be snares unto you. And the presence of the angel and the words of reproof and the threat of justicement brought tears to the eyes of these people.

And the rest of this chapter is really a rehearsal of the subsequent history of Israel during the period of the judges. And we'll deal with that in the weeks that lie ahead, God willing.

Tonight, in looking at this incident at Bochum, I want to highlight three things. Israel's command to destroy the Canaanites.

Israel's disobedience to that command and Israel's chastisement as a result of their disobedience. Now, I know that this command of God to Israel to destroy utterly the Canaanites is a matter of great difficulty and great concern even for biblical scholars and even for people who have great sympathy with the teaching of the word of God.

[19 : 31] They find it difficult to square the picture of a righteous God with his command to his people to destroy other nations.

But we have to remember what the Bible tells us about these nations. What kind of people inhabited the Canaan to which the Israelites had now entered?

What kind of people were they? Well, it is doubtful if there have been many people in the history of this world more barbarous, more ungodly, more wicked than the people of Canaan.

And you know that part of the history of the Bible is this, that you have the record, the history of the raising up of the nations and the casting down of that nation by another nation.

For example, the Egyptian power, the Egyptian dynasty was destroyed in the Red Sea and that was a very wicked nation.

[20 : 47] Israel itself was led into captivity by Babylon and the Babylonian empire became more ungodly.

and then God raised up the Persian empire to destroy the Babylonian empire. And then the Babylonian empire itself was destroyed and you have the rise of the Roman empire.

And then having reached its end of ungodliness, it too was destroyed. And if you follow the history of this world, is it not in effect a history of the coming to the fore of great nations, their destruction by other nations.

Some of you yourselves recollect the tremendous strides that were made in the 30s by Nazi Germany. And how in the providence of God that barbarous nation, that barbarous dynasty, that barbarous power was destroyed by the allied powers.

Some would attribute the same kind of thing to the rise of the communist powers at the beginning of the century. And who would have believed two years ago that you would, that in your own generation, you would have witnessed the virtual destruction of powers to which have been attributed the deaths of millions and millions of people.

[22 : 20] So, why find fault with God raising up Israel to be the means and the instrument in his hand for the destruction of this barbarous ungodly nation in Canaan?

It's the same principle. And there are many of you who have breathed prayers of thankfulness to God that in his providence that the allied forces were able to destroy Nazi Germany.

And so it was that this nation Israel was to be the means in his hand of destroying this nation which was steeped in wickedness and in ungodliness.

And at the end of the day, he who rules all nations, he who is a judge of all the earth, does he not do right?

Well, this was his command to Israel. You will move in, you will take possession of this land, and you will destroy the nations who inhabit it.

[23 : 39] what does the angels say to them? Secondly, you have not obeyed my voice. This is the second thing, Israel's disobedience.

Why, he says, have you done this? Now, their downward regression began, not so much with doing things, but with not doing things.

they didn't do what the Lord told them to do. They failed to destroy these people, they spared them, in many instances they entered into special arrangements and agreements with them, and ultimately they themselves became slaves of the Canaanites.

And you know that in many respects you have the same picture today with reference to Christianity and worldliness, and Christianity and ungodliness, and Christianity and heathenism, Christianity and many of the religions of this world which are opposed to the Christian faith, Christianity and non-Christianity are incompatible, irreconcilable, and there are many people who fail to recognize this, many people who may be sincerely misguided, but nevertheless misguided.

Israel failed to recognize this, and in many respects Christianity is on the way today because it is guilty of the same sin.

[25 : 24] And if you and I are to be fair to the word of God, with a Bible in your hand and with a Bible in mine, we have no difficulty in identifying the things which stand as the enemies of the Christian faith.

All you have to do for example is read Galatians chapter 5. I'm not talking just now about powers and dynasties. I'm talking about the things that invade our own hearts.

Listen to the way in which the apostle Paul puts it right into the Corinthians. And if you have any regard at all for these things, these words I'm sure will strike terror into your very heart.

I say then, he said to the Christians in Galatia, walk in the spirit, you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh does against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. And they are contrary the one to the other.

So he cannot do the things that he would. But if he be led of the spirit, he are not under the law. Now he says, the words of the flesh are manifest. And they are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, strife, wrath, heresies, envy, murder, drunkenness, revelings, and such like.

[26 : 44] Now you know what these things are. And you know that these things are not allowed to have possession of your heart. They shouldn't be given a foothold in any territory that belongs to the spirit of God.

But what happens? What happens? People pay lip service to these things. And they feed these things. They allow these things to reign in their hearts.

People hate one another. That should not be in the Christian church. There is strife and there should not be. And when you apply this to the spiritual realm, you see how necessary it is for each one of us to drive out these things which the Bible identifies as our enemies.

Unbelief, ungodliness, wildness, sloth. Unless we destroy these things, what will happen?

We will be overcome by these things. They will infest our minds, our hearts, our thoughts, and they will overrun us. And that is why, for example, the apostle Paul would write to the Philippians and say this to them.

[28 : 13] Philippians, he says, you've been saved by the grace of God. Strive to make your calling and your election sure. It is God who has saved you.

You haven't saved yourselves, but he says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, or work at it, keep at it. You've got to keep these things under control.

You've got to make sure that they don't have the sway in your life and in your thinking.

And you'll discover this as a Christian, that these things for you, it will be a lifelong struggle to keep them at bay.

You've got to fight, just as this went into Canaan. What do they have to do? They had to fight their way in and on and on and on to inherit the whole territory.

[29 : 17] And that's a picture that the Bible draws for you and for me. Even as they entered into the rest, the Canaanites were still around. they were to try them out.

And even as you believe in Jesus Christ, you remember that there will always be enemies hovering around you, wanting back in where they were, where the hells were.

And perhaps the angel of the covenant is coming to you tonight, addressing your soul, bringing you to your book, making you weep, over the regression in your own life, over the fact that you haven't pressed on, that you haven't pushed on, and that you haven't overcome.

There will never be a time in your life when no enemy will be left for you to fight against. There will always be enemies. And that is why you and I, like the Israelites, had to be up and doing.

It seemed as though they were satisfied with being in the promised land. They weren't prepared to engage in the agony of fighting the enemy, in the difficulty of denying themselves and pushing on.

[30 : 40] And so it is with our Christianity. There seems to be too much of this association with the world. Christianity and worldliness walking hand in the hand, coexisting, cohabiting, until at last it is impossible to identify, or impossible rather to differentiate between the one and the other.

This is always the fruit of neglect. These Israelites, as we read in chapter 1 of Judges, they failed, they neglected to push out their enemies, they neglected to destroy the nations, not because that someone said because of want of inclination, but because they were deficient in strength, because of their sin.

And they failed not from feeling of compassion, but from a want of holy zeal, and from slothfulness. I often think that the athlete has a lot to teach us in the Christian church.

Day after day after day, they are engaged in the rigor of training with a goal in you, preparing their own body and their own mind, recognizing the difficulties which are involved, recognizing that when it comes to get about six in the morning as far easy to lie in bed, till seven in the morning.

But if they want to be what they are striving to be, they must discipline themselves. And there are many Christians who have started out in the Christian way of life, full of that zeal, full of that enthusiasm, prepared to go the whole way, nothing is too much, but unfortunately, the enthusiasm wanes, neglect creeps in, and with neglect, back come the things that you'd be far better off without. [32 : 53] That's what happened to Israel, and I'm afraid that is what is happening to many Christians today. Love of sin, for example, produces spiritual weakness.

People begin to trifle with the forbidden fruit. They excuse sinful desire today in the name of Christian freedom.

Christ has made us free. This is the clarion call. Yes, free to do what? Free to obey him. Why, says the angel of the covenant, have you not obeyed me?

Why? Because they obeyed their own sinful inclination. That's why. And are there not many spiritual shipwrecks on the shore of the Christian church today?

because in their desire to push the barriers of Christian freedom as far as they possibly can, there lies no difference between them and those from whom they are supposed to have been delivered.

[34 : 04] what hovering, said someone, what hovering about the devil's ground, what secret inclination to drink the poison cup, what strange revival at times of the power of old habits, which we had imagined subdued forever, what infatuated dancing on the brink of hell, like the moth fluttering around the candle to its own destruction.

You will never at any time find the apostle Paul questioning and reasoning and arguing of himself with anybody else.

Surely I can do it. That was not his preoccupation. His preoccupation was this, how near can I get to the Lord Jesus Christ.

His constant call to his converts was this, hate, sin, and all its associations, shun every appearance of evil, speaking to young Timothy, his own successor, he cries to him, flee, youthful lusts.

Of course I can have language today, it's laughter of court, laughter of court, Paul wasn't liberated, was he not?

[35 : 37] Was he not? And what was it that he said, how did he identify? In Hebrews chapter 4, wasn't it, how did he identify that which had led so many of the Hebrew Christians to make shipwreck, because he said, of an evil heart, of unbelief.

And what does unbelief do? It alienates your heart and your affections from God. There was a time in the history of this nation itself, all route from Egypt to Canaan, there was a time when they hankered back for the leeks and the garlics of Egypt, when they were being attracted by the milk and the honey of Canaan.

Can it be true of anyone here tonight that he or she is being attracted back to that kind of existence?

Caleb and Joshua, they were amongst the Israelites. How does a Bible describe them? They followed the Lord fully while the others were hankering back for the old things.

Ah, my friends, not to other trees that Jesus picked up that awful sin and he said this, there was a house once which was full of devils and then it was swept clean and after a while, because the perfume had belonged, didn't, didn't look after properly after a while, what happened, back came the devil with seven devils worse than himself and the state of that house at the end was worse than its condition at the beginning.

[37 : 37] is it not true that the Christian church today, and I'm speaking of myself and yourself as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, is it not true that the Christian church today has become far, far, far too lax?

I wonder where you get the language, what about your own heart and mine, let's begin with ourselves, listen, let us study the lines of the believers in the word of God and the men who have left on record this kind of attitude to the things of God, the psalmist, my heart thirsts for God, the living God, I want to get near to him, when shall I appear before the Lord, oh, that I knew such job where I might find him, I would come to his place, the picture you get of the Christian church at its best, in days of spiritual degeneracy, hundreds of years after this, when many were leaving the things of God, what did some, those who loved the Lord, what they do, they spoke often, one to another, was this not that which characterized this church in the island of Lewis, 40, 50, 60 years ago, when you have people gathering in every village in the island, what are they doing, there was no television, we tend to gather today maybe to watch television, but in those days they gathered to

speak about the things of the

Lord, they knew the word of God, they knew the Bible, they knew the truth, they knew the doctrines of grace, of course, today in many circles, you become the laughing stock if you speak about the deep things of God, what's the point of doctrine, what's the point of knowing about the person of God and the work, the person of Christ and the work of atonement and the incarnation, there are many promising clues today who don't even know the meaning of the terms of incarnation, reconciliation, justification and sanctification and so on, is that a mark of the church's progress, I ask you, it is not, it is not.

How many people have eyes blinded by the things of this world to the things of God, speak about the seen but not the unseen, seen?

How many people have been bewitched by the enemy of Christ, by the world? I plead with you, I plead with you in the name of Jesus, answer the question he puts to you, why have you not obeyed my voice?

[40 : 40] why? And because he had no obeyed, this was the justicement, he was going to leave them, and he wasn't going to drive the heathen, the enemies out from before them, they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods will be as near unto you.

and the people wept at the prospect of their coming misery. They wept at the thought of being left to their own sloth and their own self-indulgence and their own indifference and their own unbelief.

because they had compromised instead of expelling the Canaanites, they were going to be left with the Canaanites as thorns in their sides and as snares for the rest of their life.

You know, there isn't a more fearful chastisement on the page of God's word than this. The thought of being left by God to yourself.

Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone. Leave. If you're a Christian tonight, the one thing above all else that you do not want to lose is the presence of God.

[42 : 14] It's the power of the Spirit. And all unfaithfulness on our part will bring its own sore and sure punishment.

If we set someone willfully spare a single Canaanite and enter into a tacit agreement with the enemy, though we may perhaps not fail of heaven at last, we shall have stripes of sorrow on our journey thither.

They shall be as thorns in your side, and their gods shall be as snare unto you, how dim their prospects had become, how impaired had their usefulness become, how much darkness had entered into the light that they had, and the songs of praise that they sang had become dirges of lamentation.

you know that I hope you don't think that this is pride on my part, but as I was thinking about this course of this week, trying to preach on this theme, you know the wish that I had in my heart, it was this, I would wish to be given the opportunity to address every single professing young Christian in the whole of the free church, and I hope you don't think that that's pride on my part.

To remind them, I'm sure that they are being reminded of this by every minister, but I thought, well, what a privilege would be for me and for any minister to have them all before you and to bring this to their attention.

[44 : 39] Oh, I know full well as a person who's in contact quite a bit with young, I know full well that there are many perhaps who wouldn't accept my thinking on this at all. I know that.

I know that I'm not the most popular minister in the free church, but no one is in the minister to be popular, but I hope to be faithful. And the thing that made me think like that was this.

I want to read this out to you. People, said someone, people who fail to obey the Lord, the songs of praise are turned into dirges of lamentation, while the remorseless tyrannous lust humbles them again and again, sinks them lower than the dust, and reduces them to exquisite and abject misery. The just penalty of refusing to get the cross and deny self that we may follow Christ lies just there. And this was his prayer. Merciful God, deliver me and thy and they and deliver me and thy whole church from the humiliation and the bitterness of being subject to the Canaanite.

[46 : 14] I fear, and I don't mind going on record for saying this, and I say thy hope with compassion and I believe with a little understanding.

I fear that we as professing Christians are not as ruthless with sin and unbelief in every shape and form as we ought to be.

And I fear particularly that our young are not as ruthless as they ought to be.

If they were, their lives would be fuller with the songs of Zion than they are with the songs of this evil world.

And that area itself is sufficient in my estimation to justify an appeal of this nature to them, to me, to you, to us all, as the angel stands in our midst and says, not in Boccambe, but in Stornoway, why have you not obeyed my voice?

[47 : 45] How many of us are prepared in the light of what he brings before us from the world? To make us stand with him and for him and to say with Joshua of old, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

No man, no woman, no boy, no girl will ever lose by serving the Lord, but you may well lose your all by throwing away your heritage, refusing to take up the cross and denying yourself and following him.

Put away the enemy, hate evil, all ye that love the Lord, cling to that which is good and follow on to know the Lord.

And the weeks that I will see how these judges, Barak, Jephthah, Samson and Gideon, were instruments in the hand of God to lead these people to a right relationship and to a right way with the Lord.

Let us pray. Bless us, O God, O do thou shine on us with thy face, do thou bless us with thy presence and with thy peace, and help us to cast it all upon thyself for thy name's sake.

[49 : 21] Amen.