

Judges 08-02-15a

This is Friday, the 15th of February, 2008. We continue tonight our study in the book of Judges. We are picking up at the threshold of chapter 4. Let's take a moment as we begin to concentrate, recognize the spiritual opportunity that God has given us and the resources that he has provided for us.

It is mostly the work of the Holy Spirit. It is mostly our own concentration. Only a minor part of what happens here is actually my presentation.

Thank the Lord. But it's important that we avail ourselves of God's grace so that our time will be well spent. Shall we pray?

Father, we are grateful. We are appreciative, and we recognize the provision and the blessing that you have given us through the preservation of your word and the opportunity that you have given us to study it together. It is a wonderful thing to share with believers of like mind and enthusiasm and an interest in the truth of your word, and to find edification and encouragement as we spend time with each other thinking and talking about these great passages and the truths that are contained within them. We thank you for the Lord Jesus, for his work in opening the door and making a way for us to have a relationship with you.

We were not a people, and yet we have become your people. We were not with any standing or with any opportunity, and yet we have been brought near, and we who were once enemies have been entered into your family and are given the right to be called your sons. We are grateful for that privilege, and we pray that as we study together tonight, we will grow in grace and in knowledge of the Savior and of your plan and purpose for us in following his example. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

In the book of Judges, as you know, there is a depiction, there is the telling of the story of Israel after they have entered the land of promise. And in that sense, as you step back and look at what the Old Testament represents to church age New Testament saints, this is a caution to those of us who think we have arrived.

We have slogged through the wilderness. We have been to Bible class after Bible class. We've perhaps grown up in a Christian environment. We've spent hours and hours in Bible study or in church or in Christian life and Christian faith. We know all about it. We've been there and done that. Our sandals have not worn out as we trudged through forty years in the wilderness, and now we sort of visualize ourselves as being somewhere in the forefront of Christian life and faith.

Some of us. Others of us say, "Well, I know people that are in that category. I'm just kind of trailing comfortably behind, sort of drafting behind them as they forge ahead. My father, my mother, my husband, my parents, whoever it may be, and I'm following right along. I want to catch up. I want to avail myself of their knowledge and their spiritual insight and so forth."

Well, this is all great, but the book of Judges gives us a great opportunity to reflect on what it means to have entered the spiritual land. What is the analogy? Think of it. You should be familiar with this.

Coming out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb for the nation of Israel, as goes the nation in the Old Testament, so goes the individual believer in the New. So that represents what? Coming out under the blood, it's redemption, it is salvation, right? That's the picture. Israel marches out of bondage. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer held back from everything that God has for us. We have by faith claimed his promise of preservation from death, entering into life, entering into new life and new opportunity. That's what Passover and the Exodus represents.

Passing through the Red Sea: baptism, leaving behind the old. The power of sin is broken. Pharaoh's army is drowned in the sea. They no longer have reach. They no longer have leverage. They no longer have the power to drag one back to Egypt. If you end up back in Egypt, you have to go there voluntarily.

Within a few days, a lot of the Israelites are ready to do that, right? Where are the leeks and garlies? We've been out here. Now we're running out of water. We're running out of food. The reality of the journey is starting to set in, and inevitably, everything sounds great at the outset, but as you start getting into the brass tacks, as the sandals hit the road, so to speak, you begin to realize, "Wow, my security is gone. My predictable environment is gone. All of the things I've grown up with and everything that we've known for generations is gone. Now

we're kind of flying by the seat of our pants. There's no maps. There's no charts. We're out here, and we're having to pretty much depend completely on God."

Well, that's no good. Let's go back where it's predictable and safe, and, oh yes, there was oppression, but how quickly we forget. We only remember the good things and tend to forget the bad.

Well, a lot of Christians in the world today have a flash of insight, a flash of faith, a flash of interest, and then say, "You know, I really missed my comfortable life before," and this is what we call losing your first love, settling for sort of a token faith, a nominal Christianity, and basically living like you did before, living in the world, living off the world, following those rules and those principles of operation.

Well, those people are going to drop in the wilderness. There is a subset. There is a minority who Jesus pictured as walking the narrow road, going through the straight gate that leads to life. Few there be that find it.

Well, if you have any appreciation for God, if you have any love for the Lord Jesus, you desperately want to be part of that group. When the saints go marching in, Lord, I want to be in that number. All of the saints are not marching in, and a lot of the people that have blown trumpets and thrown stuff in the air down in New Orleans are not going to actually be marching in with the saints. There's just going to be a few saints marching in, and there's going to be a bunch more saints standing around with the obligatory applause scene, I guess, outside, watching those who are by faith and patience inherit the promises actually go in. But we want to be in that number.

Shame on you if you are not interested in achieving this goal, because this is why we were saved. God is moderately interested in the fact that we are not going to the lake of fire, but he is very interested in us being conformed to the image of his Son. That's his goal.

The military can recruit a lot of people and get them into uniform and put them through basic training, but what they really want are excellent enlisted men and excellent officers, excellent soldiers, excellent people in any—men and women—who go in. And the goal of the military is not to have a bunch of mediocre people. They may end up with a lot of mediocre people, but that's not the goal. They don't establish boot camp and say, "Well, as long as you'll just be sort of really mediocre, why, that's great." You try to instill a hunger for excellence, more so in some services than in others, just by necessity because of the size and the mission.

But here's the point. Look at the book of Judges. These are the ones who, in symbolism, by way of metaphor, by way of spiritual communication, this is the group that made it. These had the youth and the strength and the faith and the obedience to cross the Jordan and go into the land. They have arrived. So we ought to be very interested because we want to be of that same stripe, of that same category. What happened to them once they got there? If you push through and become a reasonably mature believer, are you done? Do you just sort of encamp and hold the fort?

There's an old, old song, "Hold the fort, for I am coming." Well, we just hold the fort, just hang on, grit your teeth, and wait for the Lord to appear in heaven with a shout. Is that what we're supposed to do?

Well, we find, as we look at the history of the people in the land, that you can't sit still. God had further instructions once they crossed the Jordan. God had further instructions once the southern campaign and the northern campaign were complete. God had further instructions once the assignments for tribal land boundaries were made. Go in and accomplish the following tasks. We've already seen that they did not.

I've given you a map, and again, it's in the handouts folder on the website under Judges. There's a Word document. There were three or four. The one I'm interested in pointing out to you is the worst one, the fuzziest-looking map. And I apologize for the quality, but the main idea is there.

Remember the blobbiness that you see, the gray blobby areas? This is land that has been held or taken possession of by the Israelites. Notice the shape of it. Notice in particular to the east how much of it is occupied by Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan.

Now, imagine that the land of promise, the land of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is a glass. Okay? It's a container that has a certain capacity. And imagine that the Israelites under Joshua are of a strength and of a number to be poured into that container and to fill it and to occupy it.

Now, imagine that part of that mass of Israelites doesn't want to go into the land. They want to occupy an area east of the land. And as they do, notice that that amount of area occupied east of the Jordan roughly corresponds to the amount of the land that is not possessed and is not taken by Israelites. There's not enough of them to fill the land, to push the Canaanites out, to push the Philistines into the sea or into the ground or north or south or somewhere. There's two and a half tribes on the wrong side of the Jordan, and they say, "Well, we'll come over and fight, but we're not going to occupy. We're not going to maintain a presence in the land. We'll help you win the strategic victory," which they did. Then they went home to occupy the other side.

And so you can see, and God says, "Well, you know, they are not strong enough. They are not cohesive enough. There's not enough of them, and they're going to have to gradually become more numerous and gradually try to drive out the occupants."

Second thing you might notice is at about the latitude of the northern end of the Dead Sea. You remember last week I was talking about that incursion of non-occupied land from the west. It sticks across there in the region of Gibeon and Gibeah and along in there. Do you see the part I'm talking about? There's an unoccupied region there that is rather conspicuous.

Now, this is going to be a strategic problem. You see, there were Gibeonites, Aijalon, Gibeon. It's just straight east of Gezer and Sha'albim and so on. Well, this is in danger of bisecting the Israelites. This is precisely the strategy by which Canaan was conquered.

Remember, Joshua came across right at that point of the Jordan and moved south. He cut off the south from aid coming from the north, accomplished the southern campaign once they were subdued. Then he went up north of that same line and accomplished the victories of the northern campaign.

Well, that same strategy will work again if Israel does not maintain a presence, but notice they do not take that area. Sadly, it is the area of one of the greatest victories of the Joshua campaigns. You can see right in the middle of it, this is the valley of Aijalon. This is where the sun stood still. This is where God sent down the hail and accomplished a divine victory.

So as you look at this particular map, you see that, yes, Israel has come in and they have occupied, but there is a weakness. It is not so much an Achilles heel as an Achilles waist. It is right in the middle of the land, and it is a great vulnerability. If they are cut off, if the Canaanites or the Philistines can extend that bulge, it is like the Battle of the Bulge. If they can extend that across to the Jordan, they can isolate the two sections of Israel and divide and conquer. So operations that take place in this particular area are extremely important.

Now, on another one of your pages, you will see a diagram of what we covered last time with Ehud. It is a little flat diagram there that shows Ephraim. It has the word Ephraim in the left there and some swirly arrows and so on. If you notice, in the lower left of that diagram, you see Gibeon and Gibeah and Geba, Mizpah, and Michmash and all that. And you notice to the right is the River Jordan.

What is the area where Ehud achieves this great victory? Where had Eglon, king of Moab, set up shop? Right in that strategic link between the northern and southern portions of Israel. This is why Ehud's victory is so important. It's why he is so great in achieving a victory that is going to last for those years. Because 80 years, they are not going to have another incursion in that particular strategically vulnerable area.

But when Eglon set up right there at Jericho, right there in the City of the Palms, right there by the idols that had been set up to mock the stones that had come from the Jordan River, if Eglon succeeds in holding that territory, Israel is bisected. So it is a very strategic victory that is attained. And I just wanted to show you, by means of diagrams, why this Ehud story is so important. Because they nearly suffered a fatal reverse with Eglon.

And it is because of Ehud and his courage and the Israelites following him in battle. And you can see in that diagram how, as he goes from Jericho and loops around Gilgal, comes back, assassinates the king, and then travels up through Israel and circling back around through Bethel and Mizpah and so on, and coming back, and they defeat the Moabites. This is critical.

Now, keeping in mind the correspondence between Old Testament and New, between national Israel and our individual lives as believers, there are certain critical weaknesses that persist for the unbelieving world. These Canaanites are being defeated and being destroyed by God for a reason. God told Abraham, "Your people are

going to be oppressed, and then they are going to come back. But the iniquity of the Amorites is the reason for their judgment.”

I have been talking with my daughters in trying to counter the great fire hose of secular humanist anti-Christian brainwashing that goes on in the educational system. And one of the things that is continually brought up is the fact that, well, you have faith, and it is an anachronism. You shouldn't have it. You're just like these other religions. You're an Abrahamic. You're no different than the Muslims. You're no different than the Jews. Your faith, if you have it, that's great, but it needs to just be kind of an afterthought that doesn't actually affect anything in your life.

When we come to faith in the Lord Jesus, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. All things have become new. There is a force and a power inside our soul that ought to be transformational. It should change us. There is a source of power over problems that the world cannot solve.

With the pushing away of not only Christianity in its formal expressions and its public expressions, but the principles of Christianity and the principles of the Bible that are reflected in our culture, like the importance of marriage, the importance of respect for authority, and things like this—you look around today. Look at the teen suicide rate. Look at all of the people. How many times can you think of before the last 20 years where people were going on campuses and just shooting the place up? There's hardly a month that goes by where there's not some yo-yo grabbing a weapon, going down to a campus, and killing a bunch of people.

People are just at a loss to explain. “I don't understand why the teen suicide rate is so high. I don't understand why teen pregnancy is so high. I don't understand why we just have to get rid of the guns. There's just too many guns. That's why people are shooting.” In the immortal words of Sledgehammer, “Guns don't kill people, bullets kill people.”

It's a problem in the human soul. That is a problem that God directly addresses. The world refuses to acknowledge that, and so they're always going to be plagued with these troubles.

Well, listen, Canaan, the Amorites, their iniquity is full, and they're vulnerable, and God exploits their vulnerability. They are cut in two, literally, when Joshua comes in. Joshua exploits the weakness of the iniquitous Amorites to defeat them.

Now, if that same weakness is adopted by the Israelites in the geopolitical, military sense here, if they allow this crease and this weakness to remain, they are going to be defeated in exactly the same way as the Amorites. So, in spiritual terms, when we learn about divine truth, when we learn about divine truth, when we grow in grace and knowledge, when we try to live the life of faith, we have got to purge out the leaven. We have got to touch not the unclean thing. We cannot continue to adopt and to incorporate and to reflect the ways of the world, or their weaknesses will be our weaknesses, and we will be defeated. It is not by might, it is not by power, it is by God's Spirit that we prevail.

So, these victories are not going to simply be won by wishing that they could be won. They are not going to be won by simple military tactics. They are won by faith and they are won by courage, and that is what Ehud does. Ehud basically plugs this gap. He cements together the two halves of the nation by a great act of faith, by an act of courage, and God raised him up. It does not say explicitly, “Behold, Ehud got down on his knees and prayed.” The point here is that he acted, and it says God raised him up as a deliverer.

So these military and political actions represent spiritual actions for us. You can be in the land, and if you do not desist from and put away the idols, desist from and put away the kind of thinking of the Amorites, you will be subject to the very same defeat and the very same judgment that they are. And Israel comes very close in this cycle of disobedience and cycle of apathy, of suffering the same fate as the Amorites that they displaced. But God says, “Look, it does not have to be this way,” and he raises up Ehud.

After him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, who killed 600 men of the Philistines with an ox goad. He also delivered Israel.

It is the last verse of Judges chapter 3. Now I am fascinated because Shamgar only gets one line, and you think, “Well, where is the observation, interpretation, and application from one line here?”

Well, the first thing we take a look at, just because we know from past experience that it is often helpful, is Shamgar's name. What does it come from? Does it have a root? Does it mean something helpful to us in some way? And there really isn't a lot of help. It is the root of the name of several different individuals who are mentioned in the Scripture, but there is not really a—I don't see anything leaping out at me that says, "Aha, Shamgar's name means thus and so." It doesn't help us that much.

His name ostensibly means destroyer, Anath. They try to trace back to Anah. You may recall when we were in Ecclesiastes, we looked at the word that means to answer or to respond, but nothing leaps out at me. I always question whether if the only application is by knowing the Hebrew meaning of a word, but what about all the people for whom Hebrew isn't their first language? Would God hide that truth in such a way that you have to have a lexicon to dig it out?

So just in English, look at this. What does it say? "After him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, who killed 600 men of the Philistines with an ox goad, and he also delivered Israel." What does this call to mind? What is his weapon? It's something that is normally—what do you normally use an ox goad for? Domestic labor, right?

You get the idea that Shamgar was a guy who knew how to use an ox goad because he was a guy that did a lot of plowing. He's got a good ox goad. He's got a team of oxen. He's out there plowing, and the Philistines keep making incursions. They keep coming in and stealing the crops. They keep coming in and stealing the wheat out of the barn. He keeps doing his work. He's trying to mind his own business, work quietly with his hands like the New Testament tells believers to do, and he keeps getting messed up.

And he says, "You know what? I have had enough," and he steps from behind the plow, still got the ox goad in his hand. Here come the Philistines to do the next round of pillaging and burning and general havoc wreaking, and Shamgar says, "I have had enough," and he just takes his ox goad and he goes out there and he says, "Bring it on," and one after another after another.

He's not a man of war. He's not a mighty man of valor with his sword and his shield. He's a plowing guy, but I get the idea that Shamgar was kind of like a great big plowing guy, and he had a great big ox goad, and he just reached the limit. And he said, "You know what? God didn't put me here to plow and plant and reap to feed the Philistines. This is not my mission in life. These Philistines have got to go," and he just drops the reins, drops the handles of the plow, grabs that ox goad, and he just goes out there.

It's kind of a version of the David story, but instead of a sling and five stones, he's got what he has in his hand. And it's a great picture, if you think about it, that there are times when we are trying to be obedient, we are trying to mind our own business and work with our hands and do the tasks that are before us, and we just keep getting interference and we keep getting opposition and we keep getting a challenge and a stoppage of work from forces that are seemingly beyond our control. And there is a time when you just pick up the ox goad and say, "This has got to stop."

People are saying, "Wow, what's the story of Shamgar?" Well, there's not much to tell. He picked up an ox goad, and he just kept whacking Philistines, and they couldn't kill him, and he just kept whacking and whacking. After 600 of them died, or six groups here, the Philistines said, "Well, let's maybe go find something else to pillage. Let's pester somebody else. This guy is unstoppable."

You figure Shamgar probably turned around, went back, pushed aside a few dead Philistines, and finished plowing his field. He just went back to work.

It's particularly interesting if you do have a lexicon, and this was something that was well known in the days of the Hebrew Bible, what the word for ox goad means. This word, ox goad, comes from lamad, the verb lamad, which means to be exercised in a thing, to be practiced in a thing, to do something repetitively so that you learn it, and it comes to mean to learn. But the ox goad is kind of, you know, "I'm going to keep banging on you until you get this."

These oxen want to swerve to the left or swerve to the right. Well, every time they swerve, they get the goad, and the goad straightens them out. And it came to be a metaphor in the Hebrew culture and throughout the ancient Near East for learning. And so you find—and it is learning by rote, it is learning by repetition, it is learning by practice, by exercise—and it comes to represent the tool that was used to guide the oxen. The two are tied. "I'll make these oxen learn. I'll teach them what I want as we go up and down and up and down in this monotonous endless repetition."

So it's interesting that Shamgar, I think there's some reinforcement for the idea that he was a man of the plow, because that's what oxen did. They were the bulldozers, they were the tractors of the ancient world.

And it is a lesson for Israel. Shamgar—and it says the son of Anath—and there is some suggestion that, well, Anath, that's not a Hebrew word, unless it comes from Anah, but that's kind of pushing it. Anath is the—this is ultimately Astarte, Ashtaroth—this goes back to one of the Canaanite goddesses, and perhaps he was the product of a marriage between an Israelite father and a Canaanite woman, because it does say that they began to intermarry.

Well, it doesn't affect Shamgar. Shamgar says, "I'm going to do my job. I'm going to persist. I'm going to endure. I'm going to persevere. I'm going to get this job done." And here's an extraordinary threat, an extraordinary problem, and he used a common tool for an extraordinary solution.

And many times the deliverance that we need—this is the principle that I would suggest to you from this one line—many times the deliverance that we need to an extraordinary challenge or an extraordinary situation is right there in our hand.

Shamgar could have said, "I've got to go see the city council. I've got to go round up—we need an army, we need a militia, we need this and the other," and that's conventional thinking. But Shamgar said, "You know what? This is my field. These are my crops. This is my job. These guys are messing with it. I'm going after them," and he tackled that problem with literally what he had in his hand, and he trusted God that what he had was sufficient, and it was.

That ox goad, never designed to be a weapon, never designed to inflict any kind of permanent injury, becomes the means by which these 600 men of the Philistines are slain, and the Philistines decide that they will just give Shamgar a wide berth from now on, and that whole area of Israel is given a wide berth. It doesn't say that he judged Israel. It doesn't say that he became a great leader or that they had rest for 40 years, but the Philistines didn't mess with Shamgar anymore.

So it's an interesting little note. I'm compiling a list of questions I want to ask and people I want to talk to when we get into the eternal future, and to get a more complete account of Shamgar would be a lot of fun. But why does God include this in his word? Here's a man who took what he had and addressed an extraordinary problem, and that was enough.

He took literally the promise of God that one of you will put to flight a thousand, and when he killed 600, I can promise you a whole lot more than 600 fled. The implication, much like the book of Esther, is that there is faith involved and there is trust in God involved in these actions. It is not explicitly stated, but God grants these victories and God delivers Israel through these individuals, and we know from experience and we know from observation that this is the product of faith. God uses people of faith to accomplish these victories, and there is blessing by association. Israel is delivered because one man had the courage to go after these guys, to stand up and not take it anymore.

Notice also that this is—if you look at your—I gave you another diagram, a third diagram that shows the locations of where these various judges did their—it's the clearest, whitest-looking map. It's a map of the land there, and you've got little lines and they are numbered. The judges are numbered. You've got number one there with Othniel. You notice he's down in the south. He's down in the land of Caleb. He's down in the southern borders of Judah, territory they share with Simeon and so on. And Othniel, there is an incursion from the south, and Othniel handles that.

Then we had Ehud, and Ehud takes care of a threat in the center. Now, do you see where Shamgar is on that diagram? He's down there in the lower left by Samson. It's back down kind of in the south and also west, southwest. And this is in the Philistine region, same region where Samson is going to someday operate.

So now we're going to get another deliverance, and look on your map and see where they have Deborah and Barak. This is going to be up north. The southern and central areas have been addressed, and now there is a threat up in the north. And this is where Deborah and Barak are going to function.

So in chapter 4 it says, "When Ehud was dead," how long did Israel have rest? After that central strategic situation was fixed, it's 80 years. This 80 years may overlap somewhat with the 40 years of Othniel. We don't

want to make the same mistake that the Egyptian chronologists have made in stacking everything sequentially. They try to add all of these judgeship years and say it can't possibly fit between Joshua and Samuel and David. Well, it doesn't necessarily have to because we're looking at different regions, different areas.

So Othniel is down in the south, and the south is going to have rest for 40 years. Ehud is in the center, and the central gap there is the Battle of the Bulge. They're going to have rest for 80 years. But we know that this is 80 years later now. The peace of Othniel is over with, certainly. The peace of Ehud is over with, certainly, because it tells us explicitly, "When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord."

So the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor.

Now, the kids in the back are in the section of 1 Samuel where Saul has been disobedient and God has sent Samuel to anoint David, and the Holy Spirit departs from Saul, and God sends a troubling spirit. An evil spirit of the Lord is sent to trouble Saul. And people wrestle with this. "Well, God is a God of love, and why would God—how could there be an evil spirit that's from God?"

Well, you'd have to look no further than right here. If we are disobedient, there are consequences, and they are evil consequences. We will be delivered into the power of evil. That's not the only reason that you can be afflicted. We know this from Job and other places. Jesus himself, he was afflicted like no one ever was, and it wasn't because he was unfaithful or disobedient. But one of the primary causes of believers undergoing affliction and coming under the power of sinful people and corrupt situations is disobedience and faithlessness.

And we should always ask ourselves, when we find ourselves in conflict and being opposed and being stymied and being stopped and being frustrated in the fulfillment of our God-given tasks and duties, what's the problem? You could imagine Israelites throwing up their hands and saying, "Why are we under the thumb of this Jabin? Why did Eglon ever get a foothold? How could God let this happen to me? I'm supposed to be taking the land. I'm supposed to be occupying. I'm supposed to have milk and honey and grapes on the vine and prosperity and peace. Why am I suffering this opposition?"

And we must evaluate ourselves. There are many reasons why believers suffer, and we shouldn't immediately dismiss the possibility that we are out of line. An evil spirit can come and afflict a believer. An evil king, an evil people, can dominate and subjugate the people of God in the land of their inheritance because of apathy and indifference and disobedience and faithlessness.

And even in the land, here is Eglon, here is Jabin, king of Canaan, reigning in Hazor. Hazor is supposed to be an Israelite town now. How come it's not? Instead, that king is subjugating and dominating the Israelites who should have essentially kicked his royal rear end out. And this is of God. God sold them into the hand. Every time you see the hand, this is the power.

It's a tough truth that God would sell us into the hand of our enemy. Who is our enemy? We wrestle not against flesh and blood, principalities and powers. Can we as believers be sold into the hand of our spiritual enemy? The answer is yes.

You wonder why there are believers who are oppressed mentally? You wonder why there are believers who are depressed mentally? You wonder why there are believers who are struggling with worry? Struggling with fear? Struggling with situations at work? Situations at home? Struggling to cope with day-to-day circumstances? That's being sold into the hand of the enemy.

And the question we have to ask is, have I availed myself of all the spiritual resources that God has provided? Am I pressing toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus or not? What is my priority? What is my goal? What gets me up in the morning and what gets me through my day?

Am I looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross and despised the shame and is now seated at the right hand of the Father? Am I endeavoring to do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith? Am I looking out not only for my own interests but also for the interests of others? Am I walking in love? Am I walking in the light? Am I acknowledging my sins? Am I hitting on all of my spiritual cylinders of faith, hope, and love?

Or do I have a token faith and a token Christianity and a superficial nominal spiritual life, and in reality I am just like these people? I have accommodated. I have compromised. I have fallen short. I have stopped short. I have

decided that that hill is too tough, those people are too strong, those chariots are made of too much iron, and I am not going to tackle them. I am not going to defeat them by God's grace and with God's help. I am not going to trust God.

"Let's come to an agreement. Let's come to an accommodation. It's easier. It's peaceful. It's more peaceful. Let's just let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be." Whispered words of spiritual failure: let it be.

You don't have to listen to Mother Mary whispering in your ear. Listen to the word of God saying, "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand, and having done all, to still stand." We have got to grab up spiritual guts and push through. If we do not, look at the example of these mature believers who enter the land, conquer the land, and then fade and fail and are delivered by God into the hand of their enemies. It's a terribly sobering example.

It is a warning. What does the New Testament tell us? All these things were written for our instruction. This is our ox goad, banging on our heads, and we are going to get this lesson repeatedly in the book of Judges. Pay attention. Be sober. Be vigilant. Your enemy, your adversary, the devil, is roaming the earth seeking whom he may devour. And what an awful thing if God hands you to him because your iniquities are separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear.

What a tragedy. But what is the purpose? And again, in the back room, when they are thinking about Saul, why would God send an evil spirit from the Lord to trouble him? Is that just meanness and spite and God saying vindictively, "Well, I will show you, Saul. You reject me, I will just make you miserable"? What is the purpose of that troubling spirit from the Lord?

Do you not know that the long-suffering of God leads you to repentance? Yes, Saul has already lost the kingdom, but he does not have to lose his relationship with God. He does not have to lose his life. He does not have to lose other opportunities. But even with that troubling spirit, he does not turn. Even with David singing the word of God in Psalms day after day, soothing his spirit, isn't it interesting that the only solace and the only comfort that Saul gets is when David comes in and sings Psalms? He could not make the connection. "When I listen to the word of God, I am comforted. When I listen to the word of God, I have peace." He does not make that connection, and he does not turn and he does not change.

Hopefully, when we see this example and we recognize that we are failing in our own souls, we will turn and we will change. We will re-evaluate our priorities and learn from this example.

Well, let's pause here and take a break. When we come back, we will get into the story of Deborah and Barak.