

Sabbath School Lesson #4 – Conflict and Crisis: The Judges – 16-22 January 2016

Christ was teaching Israel to rejoice in Him amid conflict and crisis. Thus Hannah had to rejoice: “And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in Thy salvation” (1 Samuel 2:1). We trace how faith works in the Lord’s leading of Gideon.

We may trace this from when the Lord led Israel out of Egypt; He took them by way of the sea, not to the land of the Philistines, lest the people should see war, and be disheartened. When the Egyptians overtook them camping by the sea, He made a way of escape for them, and He caused the sea to swallow up their enemies. The marvelous deliverance, together with the wonders wrought in Egypt, in order that they might be delivered, made it manifest that the Lord was doing the work Himself, and that human planning or skill had no place in it.

This miraculous deliverance was calculated to strike the inhabitants of Canaan, and of the land to which the Israelites had to pass to get to it, with such terror that the Israelites could possess the land without being molested. On the shore of the Red Sea, after the people had passed over, and the Egyptians had been overthrown, Moses sang: “The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established” (Exodus 15:14-17).

All these things go to show that the Lord did not intend that the Israelites should do any fighting whatsoever. Indeed, this was plainly stated by Moses, when the spies returned, bringing word that the cities were great and strong, and inhabited by giants. At that time he said to them, “Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, He shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes; and in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son” (Deuteronomy 1:29-31). Moreover, the Lord had said: “I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out” hostile inhabitants from the land for Israel (Exodus 23:28).

It is true that the children of Israel did do some hard fighting, but that was only because they did not believe the Lord, who went before them in the way, to search out a place for them to pitch their tents in, and to show them, by fire at night, and cloud by day, which way they should go. And their fighting was all to no purpose. It was wholly superfluous, and contributed nothing to the ultimate victory, and as we read in Psalm 44:1-3: “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.” After the Israelites were settled in the land of Canaan, there were numerous instances of the Lord’s protection over them, showing that if they had only been steadfast in the faith which they exercised at times, He would have continued their victories until, according to His promise, the whole earth should be inhabited only by righteous people; for the victory of faith is righteousness.

Gideon had been chosen as the one through whom the deliverance should come. The Lord had given him the clearest evidence that he was to lead the people to victory, and this accounts for his confidence. He, who knows that he has received his commission from the Lord, that He is with him, can do all things. The Lord appeared to Gideon, “The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour;” to Gideon’s question why Israel were so oppressed by the Midianites, “The LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:12, 14).

What was “this thy might” of which the Lord spoke? It was not military skill, for Gideon had none. At the time that the words were spoken, Gideon was threshing his father’s wheat, in an obscure place, to hide it from the Midianites, who were destroying all the sustenance of

both man and beast. It is evident, therefore, that Gideon's might was his weakness and his obscurity; for his family was one of the poorest in the tribe of Manasseh, and he was the least in his father's house. It is with us today, "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). A weak man who has God with him is strong, even almighty. A weakest person, who knows that God is with him, is invisible.

All the preparations for the deliverance of Israel from the Midianites emphasised the fact that Divine power alone was to accomplish the work. Thirty two thousand men had gathered at the call of Gideon; but the Lord said to him: "The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead" (Judges 7:2-3). Twenty-two thousand fearful men departed, ten thousand remained.

The Lord wants people who are bold because of their confidence in Him. Among the first who will have their part in the lake of fire are "the fearful, and unbelieving" (Revelation 21:8). In all of the conflict with the hosts of Satan we are never to take our weakness into account, except to glory in, before God. In conflict, our weakness is our recommendation. Gideon's ten thousand men were too many for the Lord's purpose, and so the number was reduced to three hundred, which was a most insignificant army with which to do battle with the host of the Midianites, if the event depended on human might. The Lord works using method, and we are taught that victories of faith are not won by idleness and carelessness. Trust in God means alertness and the use of every faculty that He has given us. Mark how naturally the results came about through the simple and seemingly unnatural methods employed. Let us also draw this lesson: in the end, of the millions of Seventh-day Adventists, less tares, less the fearful, less those who fail the Sunday Law test, we will parallel Gideon's remnant army.

Acting under the Lord's guidance, Gideon divided his three hundred men into three bands of one hundred each. In each man's right hand was a trumpet, and in his left a flaming torch concealed in a pitcher. In the darkness of the night they came to the edge of the camp of the Midianites, and at the blast of Gideon's trumpet they all blew with their trumpets, and shouted "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." At the same time they broke the pitchers, which they carried, and allowed the torches to shine out. The terrible din awoke the Midianites, who saw the three hundred men with trumpets, clearly outlined against the darkness. But to their minds the three hundred were multiplied indefinitely, for they would naturally think that each man blowing a trumpet, with a lamp in his left hand, was the leader of a company which might number thousands. So they were seized with a panic, "and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host" (Judges 7:16-22).

Thus Gideon and his few men gained the victory without a blow. But mark this: victory was gained by men who were fearless and confident, for they were strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. They were not frightened because appearances were against them. With the Lord as their leader, they were not afraid to go against a mighty host, armed only with what might seem children's toys. And now remember that, "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Let us have unwavering faith in Christ. Always remember that "the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15). It is against Him that the hosts of sin are arrayed, and their assaults on us are really directed only against Him. But the Lord is mighty, and on the cross He has already spoiled all the principalities and powers with whom we have to contend, and our faith in Him is "the victory that overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4). Whoever follows Him "conquering, and to conquer" (Revelation 6:2), victory is theirs to begin with. There is no weakness of the flesh, no temptation of the devil, which may not be overcome by everyone who knows and trusts the Lord; for even in death itself "we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).