

# Living In The Land

by Dr. Manford G. Gutzke

## Conditions Under Which . . .

Do you realize that accepting Christ Jesus as Savior is only the beginning of a new life? The gospel of Jesus Christ is often preached with such power by evangelists that the impression is sometimes given that the acceptance of Christ, or the repentance of a sinful heart in the turning to Christ, is the ultimate act. We all know that this is a very important step, but when undue emphasis is given to the first step it sometimes leads to the conclusion that once a person has accepted Christ, then the work is finished.

You might well raise the question, "What will happen then?" Too often there is a vague feeling that the Christian is then left to live in such a way as to show appreciation for what has happened to him. The big decision was accepting Christ Jesus. We must not minimize acceptance of Christ, for it is most important, and there is a sense in which it is a primary and initial thing, a transformation of heart and life which must take place. And yet, when this evangelistic emphasis is given with no deeper teaching, at times very unhappy experiences and even loss of faith have resulted.

Let me illustrate this whole matter by consideration of a young couple getting married, and I am sure the spiritual values will be plain. A young man and a young woman started going together; their courtship was exciting and drew attention. Everybody was interested and many people were glad about it. Some, however, had misgivings because of the responsibilities of marriage. The wedding was very beautiful, as weddings usually are. Then came the honeymoon which was very sweet. Sadly enough, there is sometimes an emotional letdown, even between the new husband and wife themselves, in adjusting to the married state.

Actually, however, dates and flowers and deepening affection were all leading to the ultimate experience of two people making a home together, which is the purpose of being married. The wedding is not so much the end of the courtship as it is the beginning of the married life. This happy illustration with its great truth can be brought over into Christian experience. In order to try and understand this as Christian people, we are going to turn to the Old Testament and learn from the experience of Israel, because, as Paul wrote in I Cor. 10:11, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." And so we turn to Israel to learn.

The story began, so far as Israel was concerned, when God called His people out of Egypt. He brought them across the desert by His providence and grace, even when they failed Him, even when they turned against Him and He had to chasten them, He cared for them there in the desert, for forty years, then He led them into the Promised Land under the generalship of Joshua. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua give us the record of God's dealings with His people. Some people would feel that this was the end of the story. God had led them through 40 years of wilderness wandering, they were now safely in Canaan, so no more need be said! But the children of Israel were called out of the land of Egypt, delivered by the power of God, brought across the desert safely, kept day by day for a purpose. It was so that they could dwell in the Promised Land. They lived there in the land for 400 years under the providence of God, and the book of Judges covers this period of time. Perhaps you might wonder why we fill one whole book with this account: conditions did not change much from day to day. The experience of living in the land under the promises of God was a

routine affair, not varying much in its essential elements as the years went by.

But let us return to the illustration of married life. The period of courtship is exciting, as we have said. The wedding may be very beautiful, and the honeymoon may long be remembered because of visiting Niagara Falls or taking a trip to Europe, as well as the joy of being together. But living in the land, or being married, does not change much day after day, year after year. You would not expect to have vivid experiences daily or weekly. Life tends to become humdrum, and unfortunately, sometimes it is true with reference to Christian experience.

And so, after the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, we have the book of Judges with its record of the history of Israel. Let us review it again briefly, because we find many parallels of Christian experience.

First of all, there was the promise from God to Abraham, in the fulfillment of which promise, God eventually delivered Israel. There was the deliverance under the leadership of Moses, in the exodus, as God brought Israel across the desert. The book of Deuteronomy gave special instructions as to how they were to act when they got into the land, and the book of Joshua told about actually entering the land under the leadership of Joshua. Now we come to the record of living in the land under the promises of God, as it is told in the book of Judges.

"Living in the land" means living under the favor of God, relying on the promises of God, rejoicing in the presence of God, having the help of God. The general principle or pattern of this daily existence is embodied in the phrase: "as obedient children." This is not natural, for the natural way is for each one to live unto himself. This way of life is something that must be learned — how to live in this world as though you were not your own, but as an obedient child of God. We can learn about spiritual living for the day in which we live as we are studying this history of Israel in the land. When the Old Testament phrase, "living in the land" is used, we can think of the New Testament concept of "living in the kingdom of God," with God controlling the situation. In personal Christian experience we refer to "living in Christ," or "living in the Holy Spirit," meaning the forsaking of self will, and complete reliance upon God.

Now let us consider the conditions under which these people were to live in the land, and apply the lessons learned to conditions that we face in our own Christian experience. The first thing to which I want to draw your attention about the people of Israel living in the land of Canaan is that this way of living must be chosen. This is not an experience that just naturally happens. Israel did not simply wander in the desert and suddenly find themselves in the land. No! They came up to a place of crisis and a choice had to be made. There is no such thing as gradually changing into an obedient child of God. No, you come to the place where you must make a choice, and you decide to follow Him. "I will arise and go to my Father," said the prodigal son, as he faced his hour of crisis.

Again let me use this illustration of getting married. Occasionally a young man and a young woman will "keep company" for a long, long time, going with each other for years, and everybody in the community may know about it. Sometimes this is just due to the fact that neither one seems to be able to make up his or her mind. Whenever you see two young people go ahead and get married, somebody took the initiative, somebody actually reached the spot where a decision was made. The only reason why I mention this is because it is true, spiritually speaking. You may consider yourself a Christian in the sense that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and so far as you know you always have. Perhaps your parents brought you up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord." There will come a day when, if you are going to enter into real spiritual experience, you will have to make up your mind about one thing. You will have to yield yourself to the Lord, definitely commit yourself to Him in a new way, to walk with Him.

So let me say, first of all, that entering into the land involved, on the part of Israel, an actual decision. This way of living must be chosen. The decision must be taken. Now the second thing I want to point out is that the experience of living in the land is different from any previous experience. Living the Christian life is a different situation from any other way of life. The person who lives the Christian life is involved in two elements entirely different one from the other. In addition to the human aspect, the natural element, there is now the spiritual aspect, the spiritual element. In addition to the physical traits and characteristics inherited from your parents, and your education or the circumstances in the community where you grew up as a human being, you now have a spiritual heritage in Christ Jesus with a new nature from God, in relationship with Him. In addition to the human nature there is now the spiritual nature involved; in addition to that which is natural there is that which is spiritual; in addition to what we would call "the flesh" there is also what we could call "the spirit." So far as the Christian is concerned, he speaks of being a citizen of heaven. He may be a citizen of this country, or of some other earthly country, but if he is a Christian, he has a citizenship in heaven, and the relationship in heaven is different from the relationship on earth. The body and the soul, the flesh and the spirit, these two natures are not congenial. They are not harmonious, and sometimes their interests conflict with each other, as Paul points out so clearly in the seventh chapter of Romans. The natural comes first, and afterwards the spiritual when a man accepts Christ and enters into a new relationship with God. This is what our Lord Jesus Christ was referring to when He made the comment, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Now man *does* live by bread, as far as his body is concerned, but the Word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is food for the spiritual life. This is a distinction which must be drawn, because the Christian is going to have to make a choice: shall he allow his natural feeling in the flesh to overcome his spiritual feeling in the spirit? That is a problem we face constantly.

These two natures are constantly at war with each other and the Christian feels in himself a constant contention between that which is natural and that which is spiritual. Many a person has a strong civil war inside himself. There are so many things that he feels the Lord would want him to do, and at the same time his heart is urging him to do otherwise. These two natures are constantly at war, and the only way peace is possible between these two natures is when the spiritual nature triumphs, by God's grace. If the spiritual nature is in control, the natural will be put in its place, and life will move along with peace and joy in the heart. But if the natural gets control, there is suppression of the spiritual, a tendency to persecute the spiritual and utterly defeat it. So these two, the natural and spiritual, are constantly at war in the Christian. The Christian who wants to live wholly in the Lord will be faced with the fact, day by day, that he will have a battle between the aspirations and longings that come from his relationship with God and the tug and pull of his human nature and the world in which he lives.

Having said that these two natures are at war with each other, I point out another condition that exists: victory and peace are possible only as the result of spiritual aggression. I can think of no better word to use. In other words, spiritually we have a constant battle to wage. Now here is a strange thing. People think that with peace, you do not fight. True, but it was necessary to fight to get peace. Peace is an achievement. Victory in the war against sin is possible only as the result of spiritual aggression. There must be a positive attitude within the individual in order to repudiate that which is natural and cast out that which is physical in origin. Furthermore, victory can only come to the Christian through the grace of God, because no Christian is strong enough within himself to achieve this victory. If you or I, as believers, feel in ourselves the contention between that which is of the flesh, human, and that which is of the spirit, spiritual, the only way in which we can have the strength to decide in favor of the spiritual is

by the grace of God. God will give His grace to the heart only when there is obedience to His Word. In other words, it all comes down to this: obedience to the Word of God will follow faith in the promises of God, and if the individual receives and believes the promises of God, God will provide the strength needed to win the battle.

Now, having said the victory is possible only as the result of spiritual aggression, I think I should also set forth another principle: defeat is sure if grace does not come from God. In other words, the Canaanites (who typify to us, as Christians, the power of sin and of the flesh) were there all the time, and if for any reason Israel lost the favor and the grace of God, and if Israel had to meet the Canaanites face to face, the Canaanites would be stronger. And defeat for the Christian, defeat for the believer is sure, if God's grace is lacking.

The next step follows logically. Belief in the promises of God brings the grace of God into the heart, but this involves obedience to the known will of God. In other words, if I say I believe, God will look closely at me to see if my affirmation is translated into action. James knew this was true when he said that if a man claims he has faith and does not have any works to prove it, his faith is dead, since Christian action or conduct is an evidence of Christian faith. So let me repeat, believing the promises of God, which will bring us the grace of God, involves obedience in response to God's commands. Such obedience must be total and complete, involving all relationships forever. Here again, the parallel to a real marriage is seen. If you are going to claim the promises of God you must do so with your whole heart.

I sometimes think about my own experience when I learned how to manage a boat. It illustrates this principle of Christian living. I grew up in Canada, out on the prairies where there is very little water. I was a grown man before I ever had anything to do with the boat, and after I was grown I had some experiences with a boat that I am sure every boy has had. I found out — rather suddenly — how not to get into a boat. If you have the boat brought up close to the shore, and you put one foot into the boat, but you are too timid to lift the other foot into the boat, you are liable to get wet! I do not know of any surer way to bring disaster than to stay with one foot in the boat and one foot on the shore. That simply cannot be done. The thing you have to do is to get all the way into the boat. Well that is true about everything we undertake, and it certainly is true spiritually speaking, just as it was true for the children of Israel. Since they wanted to walk with God, they had to go all the way with God.

There is one other condition that I want to mention: the human nature crops out in several ways with God's people. When Christians are prosperous, when they have been blessed, they will relax their vigilance. It is a bit like having a garden. How many times it is true when the garden looks to be free from weeds, we tend to stop hoeing, and this is fatal, because while our backs are turned they will start growing. Or, to change the figure of speech, if a doctor is operating for cancer, we all know that the whole cancer must come out, all out, every bit of it. And this is true about living in the land of the promises of God. There is danger in compromise, in accepting less than His full will for us. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5).

## **Principles Prevailing**

"And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?" These words are recorded in the book of Judges, Chapter two, verse two, and they constitute the indictment which Almighty God made against His people. He had told His people when they came into the land and found some of the Canaanites still living there, that they must not have any fellowship with these people. They must be careful not to have

any kind of friendly relations with the people who were not walking in the way of the Lord, for in so doing they would be led astray.

Living in the world, a Christian is in a state of continual conflict. For instance, take my own personal experience. I am a Christian inasmuch as Christ is working in me by His grace. When our Lord was here in the flesh, He encountered the blind opposition of a hostile world. People were bitter against Him, and He told His followers that they could expect the same because, "the servant is not greater than his Lord" (John 15:20). "If they have done these things unto Me, you need not be surprised if they do them unto you." As a Christian, I have all the weakness and willfulness of my own human heart that I must resist, by the grace of God. I am limited by my own imperfect knowledge and my own inadequate strength. I do not know enough and I am not strong enough to walk in the ways of the Lord. In addition to that, I face the actual opposition of all who deny Christ as Lord. We may not quarrel openly; we may maintain cordial and polite personal relations, but if I am living in the same house, or in the same neighborhood as a person who is not walking in the ways of the Lord, he and I are not walking in the same way; we are not doing the same things; we are not having fellowship. Inasmuch as we are not walking together and we are not having fellowship, it is not long until we actually are against each other because of these circumstances.

Now it was exactly like this with Israel as they entered into the land of Canaan. You will remember when they came into the land of Canaan they came in with great power, winning victories in a glorious fashion, and this was because God was with them and God was blessing them, and they ruled in the land — not because they were stronger (they were actually not as strong as the Canaanites), but by the help of God, being utterly dependent upon Him. In the same way, the believer is committed to living in the midst of conflict in this world, and he can triumph in this battle only with the help of God. This is something we all need to remember. The only way we can ever have any satisfaction, the only way we can ever achieve anything worthwhile in this world, is to have the help of God. We cannot live right, we cannot think right, we cannot pray right, except God gives us help — and He will do just this if we turn to Him!

The record of Israel living in the land will show us how mistakes are made by God's people, and from these we can learn. We are studying the whole period covered by the book of Judges, covering four hundred years of Israel's experiences, and as we go along, several impressions will be made in our minds.

In the first place, the natural way of living, the practices of the world, are to be totally, entirely repudiated. I know that is a big word but you can get hold of it. You know what I mean. We must actually turn away from anything that is pleasing in the sight of men. We must realize in our own heart and mind that we are different from the rest of the people in the world and we have to be willing, every now and again, to let that difference show. We understand, so far as human nature is concerned, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," and we know it is true to say, "Ye must be born again."

The Canaanites were in the land when Israel came, but God said they must all be destroyed. The nature of the Canaanite is such that he cannot live in peace with God's people. In the book of Philippians Chapter 3, verses 7 and 8, Paul put it this way: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. . . ." The natural way of living, the impulses of the flesh, are to be totally, entirely set aside. No part of the flesh, none of the human nature, is to be spared. The will of God will never be done by men on earth through human processes. That is the first principle to have in mind, and I cannot emphasize it too much. Everything else will follow from this, so we must recognize it at the very outset.

"Ye must be born again;" you must start living a completely new life, in a totally new atmosphere or, should I say, in a totally new dimension. Only men and women who are *born again* can enter into the blessing of God.

The second thing that we must recognize is actually related to what we have just said. In times of triumph, in times of success, when everything is going along well, we tend to be careless, and the carelessness is evident in our attitude to the things of the world. Think again about your garden. When the plants are growing well in the garden, and everything looks lovely, you are inclined to think, "Oh, well, it is not so important to go out and hoe today. Those weeds will not grow too fast," and you are inclined to just let things go. In that indifference lies the very danger.

Moses had actually warned the people of Israel against this danger, as we read in Deuteronomy 6:10-15, "And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land . . . to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged which, thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Then thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shall swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth." Thus did Moses warn the people, and in the book of Joshua we find the same kind of warning.

"Else if you do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, . . . Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you" (Joshua 23:12,13). You could not find a sterner warning than this, and it was impressed upon these people, lest by any chance they should in some way miss this whole truth. Again we see there was a danger that they might become lax and careless because they were victorious. In the New Testament we find this warning: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12). It is a common human tendency, when we are getting along well, to feel we can afford to neglect some prayer time and Bible reading, to become careless, and that is a very dangerous attitude to take. This indifference was true all the way through the book of Judges.

Now the third thing that I want to make clear is that tolerance of wrong can in time make the wrong actually seem right. We are all inclined to find a good reason to rationalize the validity of anything we want to do. If you and I indulge in some worldly interest, and our family does it, and everybody we know does it, we are inclined to think it is all right. But that does not make it right. I have seen parents thus involved in wrong doing. These same parents may have stood up for something all through their married life until their children grew old enough to choose for themselves. The children drift into worldly practices, and before you realize it, the parents relax their attitude and they go along with their children. The practice does not seem to be wrong any more, just because their own boy or girl does it. It reminds me of part of a poem that I have known for years, and I want to share it with you now as an illustration of this fact that if you tolerate what is wrong, it will eventually seem right to you.

Vice is a monster of such dreadful mien  
That to be hated, needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with its face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

You will find yourself actually turning around, accepting and doing something that you never would have done just because you began to permit, to allow certain things that you used to consider as wrong and sinful. The toleration of wrong can make it seem right, but of course it never is; it just seems that way to you.

We come now to a fourth principle that prevailed all through this period of the judgment: a failure to maintain obedience, which leads to loss of blessing. Actually God will not be with you. Paul makes a statement regarding this: "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I have preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" (I Cor. 15:2). Notice how that is phrased. "If ye keep in memory what I have preached unto you," the idea being if *you* forget, God will "forget" the blessing. The apostle is speaking about the gospel of salvation and the walk of a Christian. Elsewhere Paul says, "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . ." (Col. 1:23). There is the continuing aspect of our walk.

Joshua was warning the people when he said, "If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt . . ." (Joshua 24:20). Now what I am saying is that failure to maintain obedience will result in the loss of blessing. This again I can illustrate from your garden. Remember your garden? Well, I want to tell you if you do not keep hoeing the weeds, the time will come when the weeds will take over the garden. You do not have to cultivate them, they just grow!

Let us remember a phrase from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5): ". . . I the Lord thy God am a jealous God . . ." Isaiah, the prophet, cried out concerning this in the Old Testament when he said, ". . . this people draw near me . . . and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me . . ." (Isa. 29:13).

The Lord does not expect any of us to be absolutely perfect. We are not always going to do altogether just the right thing, but He does demand of us sincerity of heart; and if we once start allowing things that are wrong, we are going to lose out in the blessing.

Now the fifth thing that I want to comment on is that the loss of blessing means defeat. If you no longer have the favor of God, you are not going to win. We are not able, we are not strong enough to win without it. Without His help we are not able to stand against the enemy.

Do you remember how it was with Israel at Ai when Achan had stolen the Babylonish garment and wedge of gold and hidden them? Nobody in Israel knew about it. But when they went out to fight, they were defeated. Joshua went to God to find out what the problem was, and God told him Israel had sinned; that Joshua must find out who the sinner was, and judge him, before God could bless them again. (Joshua, Chapter seven). The loss of blessing, if God removes His favor and does not go with us, will mean defeat. We do not demand His help, we cannot command His help, but we can qualify for His help by meeting the conditions which He lays down. When we fail to obey, if we have let down our guard, and permitted sin to come in, then defeat is a sure thing to expect. God will not give us victory if we are unfaithful to Him.

Our sixth point of emphasis brings us to a consideration of defeat. When we lose the blessing and are defeated this leads to bondage and distress, and the loss of fellowship with God. This happened over and over again in the record of the book of Judges, until it almost became monotonous. For instance, look at chapter three, verse 8: "Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim [an enemy king] . . ." The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel and he sold them! In verse nine, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, He raised up a deliverer.

The first three verses of chapter four tell the same sad story: "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of

Canaan . . . And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel." The first verse of chapter 6 again tells of defeat leading to bondage and distress. "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years." And then it tells how Midian oppressed them. Verse six says, "Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites." It is the same sad story over and over again.

Have you ever wondered what form the judgment of God would take today? How would you know whether or not a family was being judged? Or would you know if a church was being judged? If you had a church where the young people and the children were turning away from the church, would you not count that a lack of blessing? If, in a home, you found the children repudiating the faith of their parents, would not you count that a lack of blessing? This is exactly what could be expected. Defeat leads to bondage and distress, and the Lord will allow this to happen, for "whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth." But remember that distress, when you get into real trouble, brings the cry for deliverance and God will answer if repentance is true.

As we scan this book of Judges we can sense what the foolish, perverse and sinful conduct of men and women must look like from God's point of view. Over and over again Israel faltered and went in the way of the Canaanites. And yet, if you look closely, you will see how this happened in one generation at a time; and each time, when that generation cried out to God, He forgave them, He restored them. God constantly shows His long suffering, His meekness and His patience.

Perhaps with some of us it takes tribulation and real trouble before we will actually turn to God. The prodigal son came to himself in the very depths of despair. Recognition of this principle may well be the ground for Paul's glory in tribulation. It is because of the mercy of God that we are sometimes brought up sharply by trouble, because chastening "afterward . . . yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

And so in this study we have seen the course of the believer's experience while "living in the land," while he is in the kingdom, or walking in the spirit. We have found that there is always the danger of turning aside into the world, always the sure fact that if we do turn aside, God will not bless us; without Him we will be defeated, and in defeat we will be in distress. But if we turn to Him and cry unto Him for mercy and forgiveness, in true penitence of heart, He will open again His arms to receive us unto Himself. This is our wonderful God, this is our faithful heavenly Father, blessed be His name!

## **The Work of the Judge**

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). These words of the Lord Jesus Christ would indicate that self-denial is the road to follow. Not only in this present age, and since we have known Him ourselves, but through all time from the very beginning of God's dealing with the children of men, this has always been true. If a man is going to walk with God, the question to be considered is one's attitude of heart, mind and will, and a definite decision must be reached as to denying self, and surrendering the will to God. We have been considering, as we have studied this book of Judges, what we could learn from Israel's experience as they were living in the land. We have been thinking of the time when they came out of the land of Egypt, traveled across the desert, and moved into the land of Canaan. Now, when they had reached that "Promised Land," what lessons did they learn, and how can we profit by them? It is important for us to keep in mind that the children of Israel were not delivered out of Egypt simply to get out of Egypt. They were delivered from



Egypt to go into Canaan, and this is very important for us today.

People are saved, not just to be kept from going to hell, but in order that they might go to heaven. What I have in mind is this, as I often say about myself, if all that the Lord wanted to do was to keep me from going to hell, there is a simple solution — just do not create me! If I had never been born I would never have had to face the possibility of going to hell. But in giving me life, evidently God had something in mind whereby my life might be used to His glory. And He did have more in mind! He wanted me to be with Him. And so we can praise Him that the Lord Jesus Christ came to save us, not only from destruction, but unto glory, and into the service of God. Therefore, we have a special interest in what happened to Israel when they were in the land, because when Israel reached Canaan and lived there under the promises of God, this was the purpose of the whole program.

We have learned that living in the land meant continual conflict for Israel. They were in constant jeopardy. And is this not true for all who are believers? If we are going to live in the Lord we know we will be facing spiritual conflict at all times, and we must always be vigilant". . . because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." We must always be alert. There is never a time when the watchman can forsake his place. He must always keep his eyes open for the prowler, the thief, any danger which threatens. But yet, as we think of ourselves, we realize that in spite of our best intentions we can slip and we can fall. Let us consider the very real danger we face as Christians, lest we grow slack or listless in our daily walk. In case a believer is temporarily slack in his relationship with God and is being chastened by God, what then?

Let me warn you very seriously that when a Christian falls into the condition of disobedience to the will of the Lord, the first thing that will happen is that he will get hurt. That believer will have distress of mind and heart. He will suffer and this is proof of the faithfulness of God. God will not let him go blindly away from Him. If he wanders away, he will be thrust out into the darkness of distress and fear. But there is a remedy, there is one thing that he can do: in his suffering he can cry unto the Lord for help. Here is a strange but a wonderful thing. No matter how wayward a believer may be, if he is willing to repent, he knows that he can turn to God, just as the prodigal turned and repented. When he came to himself the prodigal remembered his father's house and he recalled that his father had plenty. And he was sure that his father would forgive him and receive him. He knew the only thing that was left for him to do was to humble himself, and return to his father, because his father's door would never be shut. And so this prodigal, when he came to himself, said, "I will arise and go to my father."

It is at this point that the judge comes in; we shall see this as we further consider Israel. Here is the place and the function of the judge who comes to present to us the law of God. In other words, if a believer or a Christian is in distress, or trouble, or suffering, there is always a reason. There is one important factor here. This may be something of which the Christian is unaware. It is amazing how blind we can be about our own experience. We can be in sorrow, in suffering, in distress of mind and heart, and wonder why, why, why, when actually the reason may lie very close to home. The reason for the suffering may be the lack of a truly close walk with the Lord.

Back in the days of Israel, this principle operated in the same way. When they had wandered away from God, and had compromised, and were fellowshiping with the people of the land, then the people of the land abused them, enslaved them and brought real trouble upon them. Then, when suffering overtook them, they cried unto God. God would send them a judge, and when the judge arrived he would immediately point out why it was that they were in trouble. God sent the judge to act as interpreter, to diagnose the situation. We read, "And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer . . ." (Judges 3:9). And again, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel"

(Judges 3:10).

We are all familiar with the work of a judge on the bench. He evaluates our conduct; he appraises our actions. He calls a man to accountability. The judge presents a revealing appraisal of the conduct of the people who have done wrong. And a judge in God's court of law in Israel would present the law of God to the consciousness of the guilty man. You will remember that the Word of God tells us, "By the law is the knowledge of sin," and the first thing a sinner must recognize is the cause of his disobedience. The judge used the law to reveal the significance of Israel's conduct. If it was just one man pointing out to his neighbor that he had done wrong, it would simply be the word of one against another. Sometimes we listen to a preacher, and do not agree with his viewpoint. Finding ourselves in disagreement, his preaching will be of no help to us.

But if a man preaches the Word of God, if he preaches the Scriptures, God's Word is like a mirror, revealing the inner-motivation of a man's conduct. In the life of a Christian (and especially at a time when the Christian is failing in his walk and witness) there is something universal, something eternal, in the law of God. It will always apply. When the law of God is presented to the heart, when the Bible is read and studied, it will bring its own truth into the heart, and the individual will see himself as he is before God. The Word of God, the Scriptures, the Bible, when preached, reveals truth in the soul beyond even what the preacher knows. If a pastor faithfully preaches the Bible, he will be doing his people more good than he can fully understand. If a Christian will read the Bible, he will learn that it is far more than good literature; it is the living Word of God and like a mirror it will show you the truth about your own spiritual condition.

In the days when Israel was living in the land, whenever the people got into trouble and God sent a judge, this judge was a faithful minister of God's Word. That is, he took that which God had revealed about Himself and brought it to the attention of the people. In Old Testament times this would usually be some one gifted man who was trained to teach the law of God, and to bring conviction to many hearts in a dramatic way.

Ever since Pentecost this is the significance of the preaching of the Scriptures as the Word of God that they may accomplish the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. When a pastor, depending upon God for wisdom, opens the Bible and clearly preaches the truth that is in the Bible, the Holy Spirit takes this truth and uses it to bring conviction of sin to our hearts. This is the special ministry of evangelists, or revival preachers, men called and anointed to this special work. If we compare the judges of the Old Testament with the revival preachers of today you will note a very real similarity in their message and method. The ministry of the judge and ministry of the revival preacher both strive to lead a soul to open confession of sin before God, reminding us at the very outset that our whole history is one of dependence upon God. God gave the judges certain instructions and certain promises. Their personal faithfulness to Him was to be a matter of stern necessity, because God had given them everything, and the least He would expect from them was a total obedience. The people of Israel were bound in gratitude to be obedient to the one who had delivered them. They had been slaves in Egypt with no liberty in work or worship. They had been brought out of bondage and given a good land, given cities that they had not built, given wells that they had not digged, and orchards that they had not planted. They inherited all manner of things that would enrich them physically and bless them spiritually, and in response they were expected to render loving obedience to God. When they failed in this, trouble followed, and each successive judge sent by God, would remind them of these things.

The record would show, so far as Israel was concerned, that day after day, they failed to yield entirely to God. Instead, they compromised. They were not one hundred percent in their obedience. But now He

demanded one hundred percent. We have already noted that He is a jealous God. He wants the whole heart to be yielded to Him. But the Israelites would, on occasion, hold back something in their obedience to Him. They failed to give Him the total faithfulness, the total homage of their hearts. They were tempted in vanity and pride to retain something for themselves, and so in little indulgences and in little vanities, they tolerated amongst themselves certain areas of life which were not really yielded to God. This was the source of their trouble.

Another common fault which the judge would point out is that they would tolerate that which was not spiritual. This is very easy to do. Even in our churches today it is so easy to esteem money above conviction, and to look with special consideration upon the person who is wealthy. It is so easy to crave prestige, to imagine that if a person is famous, and often in the public eye, that the ordinary rules do not apply. It is so easy to esteem social standing as being something exceptional, and members of a family with a rich heritage of tradition are thought worthy of special consideration. These tendencies are not prompted by the Holy Spirit, and, alas, we soon learn to tolerate that which is not spiritual. Even among ourselves we encourage competition for the sake of personal victory, thus causing dissension and division in the church. It is a natural thing to praise the people who win in a competition; and those who lose are apt to be disgruntled. We are in danger of tolerating something which is not a spiritual frame of mind. We give homage to the man, for instance, who enjoys popularity, and so often this comes first. We may say some nice words about a good man, but we will give our honor, our esteem and our prestige, to the man who has name and fame. This is putting natural things first and Christians are often tempted to do this.

It is tragic to realize how many there are who do believe in the Lord, but put business first. They want to do the will of the Lord but personal relations are very important. We all know people who are perfectly willing to belong to the church and who often attend church, but when there is some special sporting or social event, it takes first place. Thus, unconsciously, they are showing that they are actually putting natural things first. Another evidence of lack of spirituality is the way Christians spend their money. The money is theirs, but where do they use most of it? The same thing is true of time. How do they use time? One can also see this grave fault in that which they honor and prefer, the people whom they respect and esteem. The Bible, the affairs of the church, the ministry of the gospel, investment in missions, how do Christians rate all of these? Tragically, many Christian people put worldly things first, and all of this is an incomplete yielding to the will of God. In order to try a case fairly, the judge has to have evidence. In other words, if a man preaches to me and tells me that I am not doing the will of God and I will not be blessed, he must have evidence to convince me. There are certain signs of disaster that this preacher could point out. When, for example, a Christian is living a "normal" Christian life, and suddenly begins to have doubts, and when he is no longer really assured by the Word of God, when he who once looked forward to heaven now doubts both heaven and hell, then that person may be sure these doubts are actually the evidence of a lack of blessing from God.

It is the same with fear. There will be people who are trusting in God but they are afraid of tomorrow. There will be people who believe that God is caring for them, but they are afraid to be alone. They may say they believe, but faith is lacking, and this is both weakness and sin on their part. It is also definite evidence that God is not blessing them. They have no strength, for God has withdrawn blessing!

When sin abounds, that is an evidence that the love of many is waxing cold. And then the Spirit is quenched by bitterness, and bitterness in the heart develops into hopelessness. And hopelessness is the final evidence of lack of trust. These are all signs of spiritual disaster on the part of a Christian.

When a Christian is given over to worldliness, when he yields to appetite, to personal fancy or to

some special interest of doubtful character, or when he is doing the thing that he wants to do, there is no blessing from God.

When a professing Christian is selfish and inclined to think only of himself and his own people, or his life is marked by pride and disdain or lack of consideration for others, there is no blessing from God. It is sad to find people in a church who really want to be humble and gracious, but if you mention another denomination or a different point of view about the Scriptures, they show their contempt for those who differ with them.

When life is marked with envy, coveting what other people have, or jealousy, harboring a feeling of ill will toward somebody else that is successful — these are evidences that God is not blessing your soul.

When the day begins and you have no joy, and the day goes along and at noon time, there is still no joy, and the evening comes and there is still no joy, there is something wrong with your Christian experience. Discontent is also a barometer of your spiritual life: when there is unwillingness on your part to participate in the things of the Lord, when you wish people would leave you alone, then I say you are not blessed.

The preacher, the judge, who comes to us with the Word of God, will recognize these symptoms, and as the soul is made to become aware of sin, repentance brings forgiveness, and contentment, and joy, and blessing.

## **The Need For A King**

The book of Judges closes with the words, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." We can almost feel the frustration and confusion they must have experienced! Have you ever tried to work with any group of people who had no director, or no one to guide in any way? Such an experience, with lack of planning, no program to follow, ends in a feeling of futility.

It would be helpful to us in trying to understand our need for guidance, to consider some experiences in everyday life. For instance, can you imagine a football game being played with no officials, no referee, and no coach? Can you think of a basketball game being played without a referee? Or could you think of a baseball game being played with no umpire? We may have all the rules, we may have everything outlined as to our conduct, but we need a strong leader who can interpret the rules, guide our movements, and encourage our hearts.

Can you remember the last time you were downtown, and came to some particularly congested corner where there was a traffic jam, and there was no policeman around? Or when the lights were not working? Can you imagine what it would be like to try and get anywhere in a big city during the rush hour with no lights, no traffic directions, no policemen? Here is another illustration. Maybe you sing in a choir. Can you imagine a rehearsal with no director, or a choral program with no leader? Or what it would be like if you were to have a group of people who can play instruments together in a band, and have no bandmaster?

I am sure I do not need to go any further with this. We recognize that from every point of view, the very nature of man demands direction; if we are going to work together, we need someone who will lead us. Israel was never left to flounder around, groping in the dark, hoping to find the right way. Even crossing the desert you will remember they not only had Moses, who was the representative of God, but they were led by the cloud every day and led by the pillar of fire every night. When they came to worship God, every man had to bring his own sin offering, his own lamb, but there was a priest to help

him, a priest to guide him in his worship. Even though they had faith in God, even when they believed in God, He sent prophets who would teach them.

But in the matter of performance, in terms of actually getting things done, there needed to be a king in Israel's situation. They needed to have a director, someone who would lead them. Now Samuel believed that the Word of God administered by the prophets, and the worship of God led by the priest, would be sufficient. He felt strongly that if the people would follow the Word of God as the prophets taught it, and shared in the worship of God as the priests conducted it, they would be led of God, because God would be speaking through the prophets and priests. But Israel as a whole felt that they had the need of one individual person who would lead them, and so God instructed Samuel to find them a king. I want to consider with you this need for a king which became obvious in Israel's history. Samuel would never have denied that they needed a king. However, he felt that God would be the king. But God told him to select a king.

As we consider what we have learned in the book of Judges, with "every man doing that which is right in his own eyes," we have felt the confusion, the conflict, the inner tension, the inefficiency and neglect that exists when nobody is in charge, when everybody's business is nobody's business. These circumstances have brought very vividly to our minds the fact that in order to live in peace and in strength we, too, need a king: we need someone to lead us, each one of us needs a guide. Our knowledge is imperfect and oftentimes we do not know what to do. Our own interests, the things that we actually want, are so close to our hearts that our judgment can be biased. People can be discussing a problem and you really should not take part in the discussion because you feel so keenly about it; it is so close to you, you are unable to reason clearly.

Frequently we make plans, arrive at important decisions, are convinced that our ideas are excellent, and we tend to be "cocksure" we are right! Our own feelings seem so natural, the way we look at things, the way we feel about things, that we are inclined to think our ideas and decisions should not be questioned. We think everybody should appreciate the fact that we are honest and sincere. Our own values seem so normal that we are not able to evaluate other people's conduct. Furthermore, each one of us have our own personal feelings, our own desires and interests; and self interest is so subtle that we do not realize when we are being selfish.

We need someone to supervise us and to guide us, for we lack good judgment. We need to exchange ideas and experiences with others, for nobody can work adequately by himself. It is not good for man to be alone. When the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples to preach and teach, He sent them out two by two. This is a very profound truth, and I want you to realize that it never was the will of God ever to leave you by yourself. That does not mean you have to accept everybody as your leader, but it does mean that so far as you yourself are concerned you will need to choose whom you are going to serve. The choice is yours as to whom you are going to follow, since a guide is necessary. You know each one of us needs outside help to be able to think objectively. Many years ago I was struck by the fact that it is not considered ethical for a doctor to treat the members of his own family. A doctor may be highly skilled, but when one of his own family gets sick, the profession of medicine demands that its members call in an outsider. Why? Why could not a doctor treat one of his own family? It is because of recognition of human nature as such that in this case a physician could not be impartial or unbiased. He might not give them the drastic treatment that they should receive because he does not want to hurt them. On the other hand, he might give them certain benefits or advantages that they never should have had, but he does it because they are part of him.

I could go on and on with illustrations, but it is enough just to say that we need help from the outside

in order that we might be able to reason clearly about things that concern us. It is practically impossible for us to deal with any matter that comes up without personal interest influencing us. No matter what problem arises, you are almost sure to think of it in terms of how it is going to affect you and your family.

Let me stress the value and the importance of having united prayer. I know that personal, private prayer is very important, but there are promises that begin like this: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask . . ." (Matt. 18:19). Have you ever considered the significance of the "two of you"? It is not only that your request will be answered, but rather the agreement, one with another. If you can get Tom and Dick to pray together for something, Tom has his own ideas, and Dick has his, too. Each man may feel that he knows the will of God for his own life, and he may feel he has leading as to what the other man should do! When Tom and Dick come together to pray, to try and agree on something, Tom's ideas may not impress Dick and Dick's plans seem wrong to Tom. But the things that are the Lord's impress both of them! So when Tom and Dick come together and they agree, that agreement will be on what the Lord has said, and they will drop their own interests. Now that can be true with "Tom" and "Dick" but it is doubly important when it is true with you and me. We need to carry on our service of the Lord by seeking His will, having in mind that His will is better than ours.

Perhaps no one would expect the most fairminded ball player to play in a game and also act as umpire. There is something unsuitable about it, for no man could then be impartial. This can be seen when men walk in the woods for example. If you go into the country and walk through the woods where there are no paths, you will quickly lose your orientation. In a place like the woods where there is no path, no vision of the surrounding hills, no way to really know the contour of the landscape, there is not a man living who can walk in a straight line. Every boy scout is taught about this in the natural world. The same would be true of sailing on the ocean. If the people sailing on the ocean were left just to themselves, and they followed their own inclinations, nobody would ever get anywhere. A good sailor takes a compass along, because the compass is related to the magnetic pole, and the compass is the sailor's guide. If you are a good woodsman, you can look at the stars or at the sun and you can get your orientation. You can decide which is south or north, east or west if you have a compass, or other guidance outside yourself. The important thing is that in order to keep straight you need to be oriented outside yourself. Now if that is true in the world of nature, it is true in everything, and it is true spiritually.

What guides do we have, as Christian people? We have the Word of God and the Word of God does provide guidance, but when you and I want to move forward in the will of God, we need someone to interpret the Word of God to our hearts. As we move forward day by day, we can learn from the book of Judges, for while Israel was living in the land, it became very clear that the nation needed guidance from someone who would know the will of God. In those days they were called judges, but the people felt that instead of having a judge who would serve for only a few years and perhaps in only one part of the country, they needed a king who would be over the whole country, and the throne would be permanent.

We, too, need the guidance and the leadership of someone who knows the will of God. In order that we may be wise and efficient, we need guidance from someone who knows the heart of any man with whom we have to deal. When I deal with someone who is a stranger to me I can be led in my heart as to how to deal with that stranger. We need guidance from someone who understands the interests of others, so that in our selfishness we will not forget them. It is easy to become involved in our own affairs, and forget or disregard the needs of others.

Who then is to be in charge? The Lord, the King! He will know about the others, and He will know

about any situation which may face us. And as we have already pointed out, when there is no king there is confusion, neglect, contention and inefficiency. "Everybody's business is nobody's business" and if you leave it to everybody it will never be done. It is the king, the director, the captain, the manager who specifies what is to be done, how and when, and thus the work is accomplished. Israel needed a king so that every man would cease doing what was right in his own eyes, and all would do what was in the will of God.

We have the Word of God in the law, the Bible, and we thank God for it. We have the Son of God, who is now in the presence of God and who wants to reign in our hearts. We have also been given the Holy Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit of God activates in our consciousness the will of Christ, who lives within our hearts and who is the hope of glory. All this was amply demonstrated in the 400 years of Israel's history we have been studying in the book of Judges.

The application to our lives today, as Christians in a sinful and troubled world, has, I trust, been made clear. As Israel of old needed a king, we need someone to guide us day by day and, thank God, we have in Christ Jesus the Guide who will never leave us nor forsake us.