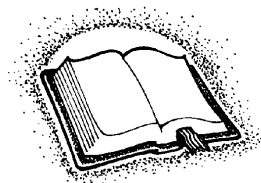


Unlocking the Bible (11)



VULNERABILITY AND VOCATION A look at the Book of Judges

In our overview of each OT book, we now come to Judges, and to a different kind of situation. The children of Israel have settled in the Promised Land, as directed, and should not only be enjoying that experience but demonstrating the excellence of living as the people of God.

But that is not the picture in Judges. It is anything but victorious, and certainly not happy. The model nation is living in fear. Why?

One reason is that they are now reaping the consequences of compromise. The book of Joshua finishes with them accepting a majority holding, but not the whole. And now they have to live with the outcome from those mistakes. Rather than be subdued, these residual peoples are becoming increasingly powerful, making the chosen ones extremely uncomfortable and ineffectual.

What is more, there is no Hero: no Moses, no Joshua. Distinctive, pioneer leadership has ceased. It is now left to local initiative.

It is against this background that God stirs the hearts of individuals – some very unlikely characters – to *'restore the fortunes'* of His people. Some of them are well known Bible personalities, like Gideon and Samson; others, like Ehud and Deborah, and Barak, less so. But all are very significant in that both they, and the background, represent very significant lessons in understanding the ways of God.

Fear

First, the background and dismal situation. Far from being triumphant, as they had every reason and obligation to be, they were overcome by their neighbours and indeed attracted to them and their ways. It was a situation of both enforced and voluntary defeat. That is human nature. The natural inclination, even of a Christian, is to *'wander, prone to leave the God I love'*. Growing in grace is a discipline. Walking with the Lord involves the will, informed by the truth of Scripture. Maturity comes by faith. Paul says, *'forgetting those things, ... I press on to lay hold'*. In a paraphrase of Romans 12: 2; J B Phillips says: *'Let not the world squeeze you into its mould'*. Compromise with the surrounding worldly environment brings weakness.

Ferment

Secondly, God stirs individuals in local situations to restore the testimony and raise up a standard. There is no national saviour or charismatic leader. This is not a pioneer situation, a way where they have not gone before. The responsibility is known; the problem is compromise, not ignorance: lack of faith, not incapacity. And in those situations, God looks to the stewards to be faithful, for each member to play its part. By Divine grace, the Holy Spirit stirs up one and another to engage in disciplined practice which is intended to re-establish supremacy and holiness. Many of these individuals are unknown,

not always very able, sometimes, like Jephthah, unwise, at other times like Samson – and even Gideon – vulnerable; and nearly always apprehensive and fearful. But under God they achieve His purpose and serve to keep the light of witness burning. Many of us can recognise that in experience and history. Local, individual responsibility arises out of prayer and obedience to divine leading in our small corner.

It is Joshua who issued the challenge: *Who is on the Lord's side?* But the challenge this time is demonstrated by the faithful practice of motivated individuals in the home, the workplace, the local fellowship. To them, Paul's encouragement is very apposite: *Be ye therefore steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*" There is an importance in being faithful *in that which is least*.