

Rest in the Lord in the Land

We should never underestimate God, because He is GOD! He is LORD of all, and only in Him will we ever find true rest and peace.

Man may vacillate, man may prevaricate, but:

“I the LORD do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

Nations may come, nations may go, but:

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (Psalm 33:12).

Please turn to Psalm 37. (I’ll quote this verse from the KJV and all subsequent references from the English Standard Version, or ESV.)

In times of trouble we can rest in the LORD and know that He will be our refuge as we wait patiently for Him.

Psalm 37:7 (KJV):

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him:

fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way,
because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

After the death of Joshua and before the ministry of Samuel, Israel entered a period of troubled times where they forsook the LORD their God and “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). It was during this turbulent period in Israel’s history that God sent forth a series of judges to set things right and turn people from their evil ways to rest in the LORD, each time restoring rest in the land. The Book of Judges is the record of the judges’ repeated interventions on behalf of God’s people.

The judges in the Book of Judges were not like the ones we know in our modern society. The Hebrew word for “judge” (שֹׁפֵט *shophet*) means “to put right and then rule” or “to bring matters to the rule of right”. As God’s emissaries to the people, the judges, each in their own time, fulfilled a specific godly mission and walked with the power and the spirit of God to lead God’s people to victory over their enemies.

Four of these deliverers are specifically alluded to in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:32a,33,34:

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, [These are the only ones we'll cover, since these are the four mentioned in Judges]...

who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

What enabled these men to overcome when the circumstances all seemed stacked against them? Faith! When they received a commission from the LORD, they banished doubt and jumped into the fray believing God, knowing it was the LORD Himself who went forth with them in the struggle. They acknowledged God's Lordship and trusted in Him with their whole heart, and not in their own strength. In a word, they were "all in."

They understood the truth of Psalm 127.

Psalm 127:1:

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

Let's take a look at each one of these men and see how the LORD God restored rest to the land when His people turned from idols back to Him as LORD, and rested in Him.

Gideon's Faith

Judges 6. In the time of Gideon, Israel was oppressed by Midian. Israel was so overpowered that they had to hide out in mountain caves and

dens after planting their crops in the fertile lowlands. Midian would then sweep in and lay the land waste, devouring the produce before Israel could and then herding away all their livestock. It was at that point that Israel reached a turning point and directed their heart's cry for help to the LORD Himself. Then God sent a prophet to tell them:

Judges 6:10:

.. 'I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice."

After this, the LORD sent His angel to Gideon to tell him that He would be with him.

Judges 6:12,14-16:

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor." ...

And the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

The answer to all Gideon's questions was "I will be with you." So many times in life, the answer to all our misgivings is to acknowledge Him as LORD and to trust, not in our own might but in His. If the LORD is with us, who can be against us?

Gideon took heart and went forth, gathering 300 men, dividing them into 3 separate companies, and providing them each with a trumpet and an empty jar with a torch inside.

Trumpets, jars and torches are not battle array—unless the Lord is watching the city. God had promised Gideon that he would strike the

Midianites as one man. To do that, he and his troops would all have to act in unison, following God's instructions.

Gideon instructed them that after surrounding the outskirts of the camp in the middle of the night, they would blow the trumpets, smash the jars, and with torches in hand cry out "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" When they did this, the enemy were frightened to death; and in the confusion of the night, all began attacking each other as they fled to the point where only 15,000 of the original 120,000 were left. Then Gideon and his troop of 300 went on to finish the remnant off. What an incredible display of strength for such a tiny contingent!

But even though they had vanquished the enemy, Gideon's work was not over. He still needed to remind them who their true Ruler was.

Judges 8:22,23:

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian."

Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you."

Israel must have believed Gideon, for the record later states that the country was in quietness forty years under Gideon. Seven years of oppression followed by forty years of rest—what great deliverance!

When we as one man acknowledge God as our Ruler and worship Him, there is *rest in the LORD in the land*.

Deborah's and Barak's Faith

Judges 4. Deborah and Barak were a formidable team, believing God together. Deborah was a prophetess who judged Israel; Barak was a believing army commander.

The Canaanites had cruelly oppressed Israel for twenty years.

When Israel repented of their idolatry and cried out to the LORD for help, God raised up the judge Deborah to set things right again.

Judges 4:4,5:

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Deborah was fearless, so God spoke to Deborah to get the ball rolling. Acting on God's guidance, she exhorted Barak to rise up and act on what God had already told him.

Judges 4:6,7:

She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, "Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun.

And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army [the king of the Canaanites], to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand'?"

How would you like to receive that commission as a commander?

- Organize your troops
- I (the LORD) will draw out the enemy and his hosts
- I (the LORD) will give him into your hand

Sounds like guaranteed success to me, simply by following orders!

Judges 4:14-16:

And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.

And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot.

And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

What an incredible victory! Not a man left in the army of the enemy. Deborah and Barak rejoiced in the LORD with a victory song.

Judges 5:1-3:

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day:

“That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord!

“Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel.

Judges 5:12:

Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

Judges 5:31:

“So may all your enemies perish, O Lord!
But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.”
And the land had rest for forty years.

From twenty (20) years of oppression to forty (40) years of rest—what a time of refreshing they enjoyed!

Darkness falls when men forsake the Lord. The sun rises again when we turn our faces to Him. May we go in the might of His Light! That will truly be a new day for us and for our nations.

God has not changed. God’s will for His people is still that there be ***rest in the LORD in the land.***

Samson's Faith

Judges 13. Even in the most desperate of times, God is not constrained in raising up deliverers for His people. The name "Samson" means "little sun." Samson would be a sunrise for Israel.

Israel had been under the yoke of Philistine oppressors for forty years. Samson's mother was barren, but in these dire circumstances the angel of the LORD promised her she would bear a son who would save Israel. She was to dedicate him at birth to be set apart to God for life.

Judges 13:5:

for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

A Nazirite was a man or woman consecrated to the service of God by a solemn vow of separation. In an ordinary vow, you might dedicate a material possession to God. If you took the Nazirite vow, you were consecrating your entire self to God's service.

Having been dedicated as a Nazirite by his parents, Samson was to be one separated to God his entire life. As the young Samson reached maturity, the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him.

Later when he told his parents that he wanted to marry a Philistine woman, they didn't understand why. But God was behind it.

Judges 14:4:

His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

After a series of aggravated conflicts between Samson and the Philistines, they captured his wife and her father and burned them alive. As if that wasn't enough, they raided Judah and demanded to have Samson delivered to them in bonds. At that point the men of Judah weren't much help.

Judges 15:11:

Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?” And he said to them, “As they did to me, so have I done to them.”

The men of Judah had resigned themselves to the idea that the Philistines were rulers over them. They had forgotten Gideon’s words: “The Lord will be Ruler over you.”

Samson knew better. He allowed them to deliver him up in bonds to the enemy, but that would not be the end of the story.

Judges 15:14-17:

... Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands.

And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men.

And Samson said,

“With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men.”

As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi [meaning, “the hill of the jawbone”].

How could any one man strike down a thousand? Only by faith—believing God. Samson believed God, no holds barred.

We too can vanquish our enemies when we recognize the one true God as the source of all our strength.

Samson judged Israel 20 years. Israel again came to the realization that only the LORD could rule over them. When God’s people turned back to Him in earnest, there was *rest in the LORD in the land*.

Jephthah's Faith

Judges 11. Jephthah judged Israel when they were severely distressed by the Ammonites, who had oppressed them for eighteen years.

Though a mighty warrior, Jephthah was the son of a prostitute and thus ostracized in his early years. But when Israel needed a deliverer, they turned to Jephthah. He agreed to be their head if the LORD would give the Ammonites over to him.

You'd never know about Jephthah's previous rejection in Israel from the way he went on to deal with the enemies of God's people. When they accused Israel of being the aggressors, he responded in no uncertain terms that the LORD was the one and only true Judge.

Judges 11:23,24,27:

So then the Lord, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel; and are you [Amorites] to take possession of them?

Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? And all that the Lord our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess...

I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The Lord, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon."

Judges 11:29-31:

Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah,...

And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand,

then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

The Hebrew word translated “burnt offering” is *עֹלָה* *’olah*. What sets this particular sacrifice apart from others is not that it was burned with fire, since many offerings were partially roasted and then eaten. The distinguishing factor of the *’olah* was that of all the sacrifices, it was the only one wholly burned — completely consumed. What made it distinctive was not the burning, but the giving in entirety. The whole animal was brought up to the altar and offered as a gift to the LORD.

Like the other judges we have been studying, Jephthah was able to deliver God’s people because he gave his whole heart to the LORD. That is why he made such a vow.

Judges 11:32,34,35:

So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand...

Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter.

And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.”

Jephthah was distressed at the thought of dedicating his only daughter to a life of perpetual virginity in service to the LORD, since this would ultimately result in him not having a posterity left to his name. But, wonderful young woman that she was, she understood the commitment her father had made.

Judges 11:36,37,38:

And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.”

So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.”

So he said, “Go.”...

Jephthah did not offer his daughter as an offering to be burnt alive on the altar, for God had clearly instructed Israel in the law that human sacrifice was an abomination. In contrast, she dedicated her whole life in service to the LORD, and that was the whole (or burnt) offering.

Thanks to the commitment of Jephthah and his household, there was *rest in the LORD in the land*.

Faith Recap

We have seen a cycle in the Book of Judges: Israel would fall back into idolatry, fall into oppression, cry to God for help, and finally believe and follow a deliverer sent by God.

In each instance, a single man or woman instigated the deliverance. Each of these judges did two things:

1. They acknowledged God’s Lordship in their lives, and;
2. They believed God. That is what faith is.

All their incredible feats were accomplished through faith.

- Gideon knew and acknowledged God as Ruler over all and acted in concert with the people on his conviction that God had given the enemy into their hand.
- Deborah knew and acknowledged that the Lord went out before Israel and would give the enemy into their hand. She boldly exhorted Barak to lead the army of Israel to victory.
- The victory won, Deborah and Barak celebrated in song that the leaders had taken the lead and led captivity captive, and that the people had offered themselves willingly to the LORD.
- Samson, consecrated to be given to the LORD for lifelong service, did not hold back when the spirit of God stirred him.

Time after time, he went forth in combat triumphant, with strength the likes of which no one had ever before seen.

- Jephthah knew and acknowledged God as the One and Only Judge of mankind, refusing to bow in the face of the enemy's accusations. He and his house were prepared to do whatever it took to dedicate their whole lives in service to the LORD.

When they took a stand, there was *rest in the LORD in the land*.

The Faith of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ acknowledged the Lordship of His Father like no other man has ever done. He also believed God to the uttermost. That is the essence of the faith displayed by Jesus Christ.

Knowing this, we can better understand why John 2:17 says of him: "Zeal for your house will consume me." It's because Jesus Christ gave his everything, his all in all. His entire life was a whole offering to God.

No other whole offering could ever compare to the one made by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in giving his life for us all on the cross. He died for us so that we could live and not die for God. Today we can present ourselves to God, not as dead, but as living sacrifices.

Romans 12:1-3:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

The measure of faith that is ours today is the faith of Jesus Christ. When we reject fear and idolatry and found our lives on the bedrock of the accomplished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will be equal to any challenge. What an unfathomable gift!

As we believe and walk out on the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, and honor our God and Father with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, there can be *rest in the LORD in the land* in our time.

May that day be TODAY, bless God!