

Zion's Landmark.

DEVOTED TO THE PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CAUSE.

"TO THE LAW AND TO THE TESTIMONY."

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Zion's Landmark.

By the help of the Lord, this paper will contend for the ancient landmark, guided by its stakes of truth, and strengthened by its cords of love.

It hopes to reject all TRADITIONS AND INSTITUTIONS OF MEN, and regard only the BIBLE AS THE STANDARD OF TRUTH.

It urges people to search the scriptures and obey Jesus as the only King in the holy hill of Zion, keeping themselves unspotted from the world.

It aims to contend for the mystery of the faith in God and the Father, Jesus the Mediator, and the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Comforter.

All lovers of gospel truth are invited to write for it—if so impressed.

My grace, mercy and peace, be multiplied to all lovers of Jesus.

HOW GIDEON'S FAITH WAS STRENGTHENED.

FRAGMENTS OF A SERMON.—JUDGES 7: 15.

(Published by request.)

"And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian."

The author of saving faith has his way of implanting and strengthening it in his people. The history of Gideon is an illustration of the method.

The bible brings this man into notice in dark and evil times. Israel, the strongest people on earth while obedient, yet becomes the weakest and most wretched of all people in disobedience. Man never can help him, but when obedient God is his helper and that right early; and when disobedient God delivers him into the hands of men who love to plague and distress him. As often before and since, Israel had sinned and was overcome, of the Midianites; so, this time, their whole land was overrun by their venomous horde. Poor and distressed they were. How much like christians now when they forget their Maker and Redeemer.

"And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord." The Lord sends them a prophet to remind them how he brought them out of Egypt: (does it look like they would have forgotten that?) How much better are we though? An angel also comes to Gideon who was threshing wheat by the wine press to hide it from the Midianites. The wine press is a good place to thresh at and to glean. All our precious gleanings come from this solemn hiding place that Midian knows not of. The Angel's visit is a wonderful surprise to Gideon, especially his salutation: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Gideon's answer is Israelitish: "O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this evil befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of," &c. 6: 13.

In our distress how hard to believe the Lord is for us. We think if the Lord be for us, then why do all these evils befall us.

"And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have I not called thee?" Does it not look like that was enough to revive him? *He looked on him.* Oh! what a precious thing for the Lord's countenance and face to beam on us. Then the Lord sends him. But hear his answer: "O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold my family is poor in Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house." He was a lowly, humble man. How different from the generals of military armies arrayed in their plumes. How different from the preacher of human institutions, and arrayed in pride.

Does the Lord rebuke him for his pleas of insufficiency in himself and his nothingness? The Lord never rebukes for that; this is rather pleasing to him. "And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man;" as if their was only one of them. But now was not that enough to confirm his faith? But here another difficulty arises: and what evil does not confront and oppose the work of the Lord? Never, till the operations of the Holy Spirit begin in the soul, does one know the exceeding corruption of his own heart: never does he know the strength of unbelief until faith begins its precious work: "The strong man armed keeps his palace and his goods are in peace, until the stronger comes," &c. Gideon now wishes to know that *it is indeed* the Lord talking to him. An honest heart does not want to deceive or be deceived.—How often the christian prays, If deceived, O Lord, deliver me from this deception: search me and see if there be any false way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. It was so strange a thing to Gideon that he should be chosen to deliver Israel, he was so small and weak, and Midian was so strong, and had them already in subjection. It was too such a serious thing to undertake, and if he failed their condition, already wretched, would be even much worse. So he wanted to be sure it was the Lord that talked to him, and he desired a sign; "And he said, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me." Strange that a man should want a sign when he has the substance.

The Savior rebuked the Pharisees for seeking a sign; but they asked Jesus to give them a sign *that he was the Son of God.* They did not believe that he was the Son of God, as he said. Like the same spirit when

they said to him deridingly on the cross: Come down from the cross and we will believe, &c. Their question carried the poison of insulting denial of his word. But the christian does not want signs to establish the truth that Jesus is the Christ.—He believes that already. He could not be a christian unless he believed that; but he wants signs and tokens for good from the Lord to satisfy him *that he is a christian*, or that it is indeed the Lord that is leading him. He sometimes, yea often, fears that it may be an illusion, or work of satan, or something he has taken up himself. So Gideon wanted to be satisfied that it was *the Lord that spoke to him.*

The Lord tarries until he brings his present. He made an offering, and the angel touches it with his staff, and fire comes out of the rock and consumes it, and he departs.—But the sign is so overpowering he fears he shall die. Poor man, like all of us, what are we? But the Lord remembers we are dust, and pities us. He told Gideon he should not die. Then he builds an altar and worships. ~~and worships.~~ This was written. So when the Lord appears to us we build an altar and worship, and it remains to this day. What he doeth is forever. His work abides. An old christian well remembers his precious deliverances, and how, here and there, the Lord appeared to him by the way, and these remembrances *remain to this very day in his soul.*

That night he is commanded to cut down his father's altar to Baal, and cut down the grove (idolators love to worship in cool, shady, flowery places and on high places where they can be seen) and take his father's second bullock, and build an altar to God, and offer that bullock. Here a sacrifice is required. Must he oppose the religion of his father? Must he cut down an altar devoted to a god? Yes; he must forsake father and mother, and, more than that, he must condemn the false religion of his father, and, more than condemn, he must throw down and trample under foot, and even slay his father's bullock and offer it. Great reformers have hard struggles and encounter much opposition, yet no good would be done without it.

Gideon through fear does this in the night. Was he cowardly? The Lord calls him a mighty man of valor. When he hid to thresh wheat, was that valorous? When he cut down Baal's altar, &c., in the night, was that valorous? Not, as the world would say. But he was. He hated wrong and loved right so much he would obey the Lord, if he had to do so in the *dark night.* Nothing would keep him from obeying the Lord. That was valor.

Next morning there is a mighty stir about Baal's altar. Touch men's religion if you want to offend them. But if you attack their religion and they get mad that is no sign it is true religion, or that they are true worshippers; for true worshippers have a humble meek spirit. God moves on the heart of Gideon's father, and he denounces this old Moabitish god of Baal, or Beelzebub, and says, will ye plead for Baal; if he be a god let him plead for himself: This is sensible, for surely if he is a god he can take care of himself.

But as the Lord's time of deliverance nears the troubles increase. Behold the Midianites, the Amalekites, and children of the east are gathered for battle, and pitch camp in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the Lord comes on Gideon, and he blows a trumpet, and Israel begins to gather after him, from several tribes. Is not this sign enough; Is he not now ready to fight? Hear him. "And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save by mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and if it be dry on all the earth besides, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said." Had he not signs enough before; No, faith had not yet overcome. See how he has it. He puts the fleece of wool on the floor, under a roof, where dew never falls, and says, now if there be dew on this only, and none on the *earth*, then he would know &c. It is so; for next morning he wrings out a bowlfull of dew from the fleece, and the earth was dry. Was not this enough; No, he wants to prove it. Oh how careful; Shall we condemn him; The Lord does not. I do not mean to justify unbelief or doubts. Perhaps no one ever doubts but a christian, and yet I do not justify or encourage doubting. A christian needs no encouragement to doubt. He does that naturally. The scriptures do not encourage it, but, on the contrary, encourage faith. But I think this; that a man, who has never felt that he has an evil heart of unbelief, has never groaned over his vile heart, knows nothing of himself as he ought to know; and that the preacher, who says one cannot be a christian if he has any doubts, knows nothing of Gideon or his army. But, on the other hand, as a christian sees how such a man as Gideon wants signs and feels his weakness, and sees how gracious the Lord is to him, it will be a sweet morsel of food to his own soul. As Gideon had to cut down his father's false altar before he built the true one, so faith is established as unbelief is slain, or sinks away; but much work is done in fear and in the *dark* before this strongly entrenched idol of unbelief is hewn down.