

Not Standing Idly By

Studies in the book of Joshua will bring an individual face to face with the battles of Israel as they set out to conquer the land of Canaan. Having been wanderers in the desert for forty years, they are now on the brink of obtaining the promise given to Abraham, a glorious moment in their history.

As you reflect upon their battles, we see that God was fighting for them. In Joshua 10, when Israel went up against the five kings of the Amorites, "Jehovah discomfited them before Israel, and he slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah. And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that Jehovah cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died" (vs. 10-11). Time and time again, Jehovah delivered the enemy into the hands of Israel. But even though Jehovah fought for Israel, Israel was required to engage the enemy. Jehovah didn't just destroy the inhabitants of the land and allow Israel to occupy it: He required that they, too, fight.

The need for Israel to do their part is seen in Jehovah's dealings with the tribes that took their inheritance of the land east of the Jordan. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh, chose to dwell east of the Jordan. Upon their request to do so, Moses said, "Shall your brethren go to the war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which Jehovah hath given them" (Numbers 32:6-7)?

Like Israel, we too are involved in a war: a spiritual war "against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12), and in this battle the "weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full" (2 Corinthians 10:4-6). The war we fight is against carnal inclination. It is a war of victories and losses. Some are saved, snatched out of the fire (Jude 23) by those who are seeking to serve the Lord. Some are lost when they give "heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1), a war between light and darkness, good and evil, the servants of God and the devil and his angels.

The battles we fight today are the same ones fought by those who preceded us and are the same ones who those who follow will fight. The question is not so much whether the enemy was stamped out, but whether we were faithful in the battles we fought? Paul said to Timothy, "I

have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

The question demands an answer: "are you engaged in the war?" It's one thing to claim allegiance to a cause, it's another to be actively involved in its progress. Moses rightly inquired of the tribes of Reuben and Gad as to whether or not it was right for their brethren to go into war while they sit in the peace and comfort of a land already won by their brethren. Listen to his admonition: "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?" Not being involved in the battle has three effects. It discourages: "wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which Jehovah hath given them" (Numbers 32:6-7)? It destroys the people: "And, behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of Jehovah toward Israel. For if ye turn away from after him, he will yet again leave them in the wilderness; and ye will destroy all this people" (32:14-15). It is sinful: "if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against Jehovah; and be sure your sin will find you out" (32:23).

The battles we fight today are no less important than those fought before us. Wherever the gospel has gone, Satan is not far behind. The battle we fight needs men who are, as Paul and Barnabas, "men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26). Men, like Epaphroditus who, "for the work of Christ (he) came nigh unto death, hazarding his life to supply that which was lacking in your service toward me" (Philippians 2:30).