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LEVITICAL SERVICE

Numbers 1: 47-54; 3: 11-18; 4: 1-3; Philippians 9: 19-30; Romans 12: 1-5

R.D.P. We have read a lot and need necessarily only to touch very briefly on some of the scriptures, but the whole sections are in mind. As we mentioned in the first reading, the numbering of those who were for military service in Numbers comes first, but there was a second numbering, and that was of the Levites. This numbering was distinctive. It is bound to be noticed that it says specifically, "the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them", as far as the military side of things was concerned. It is interesting to look at the numbers. Scripture tells us there were about six hundred thousand soldiers and there were about twenty-two thousand Levites of whom about eight thousand were in active service. When you come to the priests I think there were three thousand, so you see how numbers reduce. It suggests refinement.

But, you say, what is the difference between the soldier and the Levite; and how can we apply this and get help from it in this day? I believe the soldier, as we have said, has to do in our individual lives; in our work, our homes, our families, in the relations that we have with other persons. It is the way in which the soldier is faithful to the testimony of God, the tabernacle of testimony is here.

He fills out his place given to him in the sovereignty of God, and in responsibility takes up that situation as one who has come under the scrutiny of Christ. He takes up the charge and fills it out. I think the Levite is not numbered amongst the military, because he has to do with the things of God, in connection with the tabernacle itself. He is not a man who has part in the fighting or the defence of things but he has part in the handling, the bearing, the carrying, the taking down and the erecting of the tabernacle. We learn from all these things.

There were all different people in the Old Testament, but of course when you come to the New Testament, these are different features which mark the believer as having the Spirit as he takes up these services; the soldier as to defence and the Levite serving in the more

intimate things of God. The believer also of course is constituted a priest which maybe we shall not touch much on today, but that is the greatest thought because the Levite was given to the priest as a gift.

I wondered if we might consider the service of the Levite and see how it applies to us in our day. There is not only a call to individual faithfulness in our ordinary lives, the lives of young people, the lives of those of us who are older, in what we do, what we engage in, what we pursue, and all these things, in order that the testimony is defended: but there is also this calling to be occupied with the work of the tabernacle, the work of what is precious to God. It is not now a question of fighting. We need to remember that. As far as I see from the scripture the Levite does not have part in the army, he is not part of the military. In fact if you go to David's day, he made a great mistake when he wanted to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom. He goes with a mighty force of military people (see 1 Chron 15: 25). I suppose they went with their weapons and all their equipment, to bring up the ark of God, and it was full of the good intentions of the heart of David. He wanted to make a better place for the ark, but God blew upon the whole enterprise. I think one of the reasons was that he approached what was not a military matter with an army.

Now you will notice also that the military were numbered from twenty years old, and as was suggested, if we applied that to Christianity, it would seem to suggest persons who have received the Spirit, who are mature, who have reached a certain manhood, and confess the Lord's name. Why then does the Levite not begin his service until thirty years old? It is as if there is not only manhood but a certain added maturity about serving in relation to God, and he serves from thirty years old to fifty years old. These ages may not apply literally to us but they are very suggestive. One thing I think, in relation to that thirty years to fifty years, is that God would have the best years of your life in relation to His things. After fifty years the Levite did not serve, but he never relinquished the charge. He carried the charge for the rest of his life but the peak of his strength and his vigour was given to God. He is not spending the best of his

strength in relation to what is here, but in relation to what is for God.

God is so pleased with them, that where the Levites are brought before Jehovah in chapter 8, He brings the age down to twenty-five; He says, “from twenty-five years old and upward”, Num 8: 24. It is almost as if He would say, I wish there were more persons who would be occupied in the labour of the tabernacle, here in this time in the wilderness when the enemy is attacking. I thought we might look at these things, the three families, the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites. It is interesting that Gershon was the eldest but Kohath had probably the most distinguished service. It brings out the sovereignty of God again.

I wondered if you do not see in Philippians what this is in working out. This is not persons on platforms. The idea of the Levite is not principally someone on a platform, or who has some prominent place. It is persons like Timothy, who will care with genuine feeling how the saints get on. He says, I do not have anyone like him who will do that, and then he refers to Epaphroditus, “he has served with me in the work of the glad tidings”. He said he risked his life even to death, that the ministration of the saints might be seen at its best. It is a man who facilitates all that he can, among the saints, for the promoting of God’s work among them; he is a man of feeling. Timothy was a man of feeling. I wondered if we might look at those scriptures and see that Paul prefaces that chapter there with the mind that goes down. I think what would mark a true Levite in this day in which we are, a true Christian, you may say, occupied in the care of the things of God, is that he has a mind that goes down, a lowly mind.

I read the scripture in Romans because I came across a remark of Mr Taylor’s while I was looking at this: someone said, Romans 12 would be the twenty years of age – that is a soldier – and he said, No, I think it is the thirty years of age. Romans 12 suggests how a Levite, one who takes up what is levitical, enters into the service. That is the basis really in Romans 12, and how he becomes fully occupied with the tabernacle, and learns to identify the pieces of the tabernacle; he learns about the bases and the boards

and the curtains and the precious things, and to love them and to carry them and hold them and care for them. It is just my impression that it is a place of great humility and dependence and affection among the people of God.

R.H.B. You said that the ark went into captivity because it was not cared for, and it still was not cared for properly when it was recovered, was it? It was put on a cart, and it became established that only the Levites were to handle it. It was not to be put on a cart, and David the soldier was not allowed to build God's house because he was a man of blood. God specifically said that. A very noble desire on his part, and he provided for it abundantly, but a man of blood was not to build the house of God. What would you say as to that?

R.D.P. It is interesting. Of course we are making applications of all these things, the brethren understand that, and an Old Testament scripture cannot always be made to stand foursquare, but they are suggestive to us. That David took the military to handle the precious ark of God, was something that God blew upon, and we might learn some lessons from that, because it might seem that that great show of force and glory and power and the way that he went about it would have been the thing to do, triumphant, you see, but God blew upon it. Perhaps we need to learn that among the people of God there is the side for the military, the defence, the defence of the testimony, the tabernacle of testimony, but when we come to be handling the precious things of God, which principally includes what is amongst the people of God, it calls for what is different. I suggest that the way that what is levitical operates today involves a going down mind. It is a mind after Christ, and that is the way the tabernacle is served it seems to me.

R.H.B. I was struck with what you were saying because if we think of how it applies to us, matters may arise amongst us, and we may instinctively think of dealing with them administratively because of a desire for closure in relation to the matter. But Paul speaks of travelling – profound exercises that he went through – in order that what he put out in ministry might become more effective and

formative among the saints. That is the heart of a true Levite, is it not?

R.D.P. I believe so, so we can learn something even from current events. You see in these wars that are going on in Iraq, and elsewhere, that the military cannot do everything, and there are certain situations for which they are not fitted. We might feel in relation to the handling of the things of God that the best thing to do is to go in with force, but I do not think that is the way that God operates among His people. The testimony involves how God is displayed as among the people of God. There were literally boards and curtains and pieces of precious furniture in the tabernacle, but when you translate them in our day the testimony is here by the Spirit and it involves the saints, what is being worked out in the lives of men and women here in flesh and blood, persons who are marked by frailty and weakness. The Levites have to carry it, and their object was to reach the end of the wilderness. Though circumstances changed with the passing years, everything about the holy things was as precious at the end as it was at the beginning.

What a thing it would be, beloved brethren, if that could be something we could hold as a vision in our hearts.

G.C.B. Say more about the going down mind marking the Levite.

R.D.P. I thought it was interesting that Philippians 2 starts with, "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus", before he goes on to speak about Timothy as "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on. For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ". The beginning of the chapter is about the mind that goes down, and then he speaks about a person who is like-minded. What do you think yourself?

G.C.B. It is helpful that you have drawn our attention to that connection. I was also thinking that the greatest matter is God's approach to us and our approach to God, so the Levite would always have that in mind, would he not? He would be humble in that relation.

R.D.P. Yes, he gets very close to the priest. As I say, we are only learning from the type, but he is given to the priest and everything that he does is really dependent upon the priestly impulse and movement as appointed: “over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all its vessels”. Later in chapter 3, you have the generations of Aaron and the exercise of the priesthood, and then it comes on to the Levites serving in relation to them. What is levitical seems to me to be very close to what is priestly but it is not quite at that level. So what is levitical work? It is bearing the burdens, it is carrying the weight, it is picking up the loads and bearing them sometimes through difficult days, helping, and caring as needed and taking down the tabernacle and putting it back up again, and going on, and on, and on. It is like these men, it seems to me, like Timotheus and Epaphroditus who were ready to die so that what is of Christ might be preserved and promoted.

P.M. I am tested by it. Was the age of thirty in view of training? The generation coming on would see how things were handled, and they were to keep themselves. Was it to hold their affections that they might be trained to be here suited to the things of God and to handle them in a right way?

R.D.P. I believe so. And there is the thought of a training period among the people of God. Those that were numbered for military service at twenty years old were men, and so they are today. When we say ‘men’, the sisters would know that scripture in this sense includes men and women; it is not just the males, it includes both, but they were mature. They had reached a period of strength, they were not children any more. In the language of our day they had received the Spirit and confessed the Lord, they were persons who were moving on here, but there is still a need for training. Now you and I have witnessed, and I have no doubt the younger ones in some way are witnessing today, how things are carried on among God’s people.

P.M. Does Paul show how *he* served, “night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears”, and then he says, “now I

commit you to God” (Acts 20: 31,32), as if the way he had served could be handed over, if I might speak reverently, to God Himself, that there was something that had been maintained in its due character?

R.D.P. That is good, it could be maintained and continued. There must have been in the wilderness literally, a handover of generations in relation to what was levitical, and certainly there seems to be a felt need for more. I think the fact that the age is brought down to twenty-five in chapter 8 would allow more persons to be involved, to care for the saints, to spend the best years of their lives, beloved brethren, in devoting them to what is being worked out amongst the saints. They looked after the ark and the precious things, the table and the candlestick, they looked after the curtains, after the boards and the tent-pegs and all of it and they devoted their whole lives to the service. We live in a time where careers and work and associated things are demanding more and more from us; it seems to me that the best years of our lives, the strength of them, should be devoted to God’s testimony.

E.O.P.M. You spoke of the changing scenario as they went through the wilderness. One of the things that have changed in our generation is numbers with whom we walk, now far less. There are a lot of us who, you might say, have been catapulted into having to take things up without really having the training, or what training we had was during years when things were not normal. That is no excuse for not being exercised that they should be done properly. It may be of necessity I have to take things up in my locality in care for the saints, and I may feel very untrained and unready, but the Lord would still help me. We are not to say, Well I am not ready yet, I am not trained, but He would give us the training if we commit ourselves to the charge.

R.D.P. So in a way Timothy was catapulted into a situation that perhaps he was not expecting with the defection of Barnabas; when Barnabas and Paul separated from one another, Paul sees something in Timotheus and he says he would have him go forth with him. You could say that he was possibly unprepared for that

because it involved quite a different life from that which he had lived. I think what you say is right. If God puts us in a situation that we do not feel equal for, He makes no mistakes. He will not leave us without resource. He might make us more dependent in the doing of it, but He will not put us in a situation for which He will not fit us.

E.O.P.M. He does not expect a lower standard. The saints will be cared for at the divine standard. I think it is one of the lessons we learned from some of the older men that were among us, that God will not have His own handled in a way that does not reflect what He is Himself. I think if we do God will have to say to us, as I am sure some of us have proved. The saints are very precious to God. The tabernacle system was very precious to God. You handle the boards in the same way as perhaps you would have handled one of the holy vessels.

R.D.P. I am sure that is right. The sovereignty of God enters in again, as we said. If you look at the literal history Gershon was the eldest of the three sons, but when it comes to the care of the holy things – you may say the most delicate care – it is Kohath who is chosen. That is sovereign, is it not? Those two things run together, responsibility and sovereignty, and God arranges things sovereignly in certain ways. We have to accept that there is blessing in it, even if what we have to handle may seem to me relatively unimportant.

There was one man in David's day who defended a plot of lentils and delivered it (2 Sam 23: 11,12). You may say, Well was that supposed to be in the defence of the testimony? God had put a man there and he had defended the plot of lentils to the end, and who could understand the mystery of that? It is all part of God's ways.

And so it is in the tabernacle system, you carry it and you do it, and you do it to the Lord, and there is a spirit that seems to be there in these men in Philippians which conveys the Spirit of Christ. I think the Spirit of Christ would be there in what is levitical.

J.W. Would you help us as to the bearing upon us of the Levites being numbered from a month old and upward?

R.D.P. That is interesting because one scripture says they were numbered from a month old and upward and the other that they were numbered from thirty to fifty. Can you tell us what it means?

J.W. I am seeking help, but it shows that there is potential. They are in the family of the Levites, are they not? I wondered if at a very early age they would start getting trained for their mission, as it were, in the family of the Levites. It says of Timothy that from a child he had known the holy scriptures (see 2 Tim. 3: 15).

R.D.P. Yes, we read in the scripture earlier, “the prophecies as to thee preceding” (1 Tim. 1: 18), whatever that means; something had happened previously as to that. But you think of our children. We are not now speaking about the military side – that comes with manhood – but in Numbers the levitical side, the handling of that which is precious to Himself in His testimony and in His people here, He numbers them from a month old and upward. We had a baptism the other night of a little child who was a little older than a month, but there is God’s interest, you may say, Number it for the service; and surely that is going to make a difference to the way we operate in relation to our young people, because they are to be trained. You think back to when some of us were young, and there were persons of character, some of them remarkable. Most of them are now with the Lord, and you do not remember much perhaps about what they said, but you remember the kind of people they were, the way they handled the saints, and you learned from them perhaps more than we realised, of how the precious things were handed down from generation to generation. The faith according to Jude (v 3) has not been given to an ecclesiastical class or to men, it has been delivered to the saints. Think of God taking His most precious things and charging persons through Paul to keep them by the Holy Spirit (see 2 Tim 1: 14). He puts it among the saints, delivered to the saints, puts it there, and it is our charge and responsibility.

P.J.W. Would Abigail be an example of what you are speaking of. David said, “blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from coming with bloodshed”, 1 Sam 25: 33. She spoke of it not being a hindrance to him when he took the throne.

R.D.P. Yes, he had been offended and he was going to go out the next day with his army to have vengeance. He said later that by the morning light there would have been none of the males left if Abigail had not come, he would have destroyed them all (see v 22). She had come and exhorted him not to act in a way which might be a stumbling block to him. She tells him he was bound up with the bundle of the living (see v 29). She is in a levitical spirit really because she indicates that he was having to do with the things of God, not only directly but in the way and the manner in which he operated. So it may be with us.

Q.P. We see this in the Lord Jesus when he was speaking to Pilate; he says, "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my servants had fought that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from hence", John 18: 36. It is like the setting aside of the military thought, and the mind to go down even into death.

R.D.P. "If my kingdom were of this world, my servants had fought" amplifies what we said. As far as this scene here is concerned it is not an offensive war, it is defending what is precious to God. When you come to the inheritance I think the military undertake what is offensive because there are people in the territory who have to be dispossessed, and you need extra training for that. We have spoken about training. The first five chapters of Joshua give us some additional and intense military training, and new resources are required, and new weapons, and they are assembled there. That is for offensive warfare. But in the wilderness where we are here in the world it is defensive.

R.H.B. The reference that our brother made as to a month old would exercise us as to what we want for our children; whether we want material success. I was thinking of Hannah, in a dark day she wanted a Levite, a man child, and she lent him to Jehovah to serve in the holy things even before he knew Jehovah. There is an example of a mother who wanted her child to be a Levite.

R.D.P. Yes, a remarkable thing. He was brought to the temple after he had been weaned. I do not know what age that would be but it suggests very tender years, and there he was, and all around him was decay, decline, breakdown, even in the priesthood, the wickedness that we have spoken of earlier was in every place. God spoke through the prophet and then through Samuel, and so on as the history unfolds, and what was Hannah doing all through this time? Well, every year she came up with another coat, and it is almost as though she was still honouring that commitment, that “from a month old and upward”, he had been committed to Jehovah. Let us not forget, among the sorrows and pressures among the saints that do occur, and sometimes can take an inordinate amount of time to resolve, there is a generation coming up that God is going to use and it needs caring for and providing for. Hannah I think represented that.

D.E.R. There were three families of Levites. There were the Kohathites and, it has been said, their charge was in relation to the truth. Then there were the Gershonites, what they had to take care of was the principles. Then there were the Merarites, and they had to care for the souls of the saints. For us the three must go together, we cannot have one at the expense of another, do you think?

R.D.P. I am sure that is right, because the truth is being worked out in the saints and that is where the Spirit is. The detail of these things, the precious things, as you say, the ark and so on, were handled by the priests and then they were carried by the Levites. You thank God for that feature, do you not? But the hangings, the curtains, were things which were woven. That is like meetings like this. In a certain sense there is weaving going on. There are the principles of the truth and there is our understanding of it, being woven in together in relation to what belongs to God. And then the people of God, the structural things that it all hung upon, all of them are one whole, you cannot separate them. It is separated for us in the scriptures because we need to be helped with teaching, but the whole thing is one piece.

D.E.R. It is important that we do remember that the three go on together. The truth is our bond to start with, and that is what Kohath was concerned about. And then, as you say, Gershon was the principles, the curtains, the truth as to the fellowship, and then Merari was concerned about the saints and how they were getting on.

R.D.P. Yes, all being carried. Think of our lives and where the believer is today and all the exercises that there are to concern us.

They all have to be carried, and carried with a view to the fact that the testimony of God in this wonderful display will be preserved intact. And it is in the wilderness, and it is in conditions of flesh and blood and weakness, and all that relates to it. The Levite operates like that and it must involve that he is a spirit like Christ.

J.S.G. I would like you to say more about why so much reference comes in to what is God's. They shall be Mine, "every firstborn is mine", "mine shall they be", and it is the same in chapter 8. Can you help us a little more as to the thought in that?

R.D.P. Well, the Levites were taken instead of the firstborn (see Num 3: 41). God had claimed the firstborn when he brought them out of Egypt, and then He takes the family of Levi instead of the firstborn. In actual fact there were more firstborn than there were Levites, and the residue of them was ransomed (vv 44-51). It seems to emphasise again the relatively few of those that there were available to handle the precious things. So the thought of the firstborn is transferred in that way to these who are operating in relation to the tabernacle of testimony, and we know that there is a link with that in the assembly, is there not, "the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heaven", Heb 12: 23. He claims them for Himself.

M.J.W. It is quality, the firstborn was the best. So you can understand God saying, that is Mine, the best is Mine, and that character of things seen in the firstborn was transferred to the Levites, it was quality.

R.D.P. Yes, and you see this refinement continuing. As I said, there are six hundred thousand of the military men, twenty-two thousand

of the Levites, eight thousand in service, so you get this idea of refinement and you think of God's joy in what there is there before His eye in quality.

J.S.G. I wondered if it linked with the expression that we get both in Exodus 19 and in Malachi as to possession (see Exod. 19: 5; Mal. 3: 17). Is there a suggestion that God is expressing His love and special desire after this kind of character in His own people?

R.D.P. I am sure that is right. "My own possession", he loves it, and he claims it. Even through the wilderness He says, "Touch not mine anointed ones" (1 Chron. 16: 22); there is something very precious to God in it, and in this service here I think there is something that comes out that is distinctive. I thought these men in Philippians really set it out. I may have had an impression of what is levitical as being somewhat official, and of course there is the side of it that involves that matter of charge. But this chapter seems to set out the quality of those who form part of this family.

R.H.B. That official idea may be engendered in our minds by expressions that we use – terms like the 'levitical list', and we know what is meant.

R.D.P. What did we mean?

R.H.B. We meant people who serve in ministry who are ministered to by the saints. But every believer is constituted a priest, and every believer is constituted a Levite, are they not? Whether they are levitical in activity and priestly in character, is a challenge to all of us. That is what we are taken up for, as we put our faith in Christ and come into blessing. It is not optional to a few, it is what we are all taken up for, is it not? I think it is very important what you are saying that whereas the military and the Levites and the priests were actually different classes of persons among the tribes of Israel, in Christianity all these features are to mark each one of us: none of us is exempt are we?

R.D.P. That is right, and why is that? It is because we have the Spirit of God. All these features which are set out in types and images and patterns for us in the Old Testament to help us to

understand, are to be seen in the saints by the Spirit. I believe that the thought of serving in relation to the things of God is a greater privilege and blessing even than standing in the defence of the testimony. It is difficult to compare these things but it is nearer to the heart of God. One is protective, the other is embrative.

R.H.B. There is a reference in Philipians 4 to an appeal to two sisters, "to be of the same mind in the Lord" (v 2), and then the apostle says, "yea, I ask thee also, true yokefellow, assist them" (v 3). That is levitical service, is it not?

R.D.P. That is levitical service, yes; and I would like to emphasise that second reference, that it is one thing to be able to say that they should be one in the Lord, but what about the "assist them". Look at the prophets in Haggai's time. When the building of the house had stopped, they brought Jehovah's message to the people, which was a reprimand really as to their lethargy, but it says, "the prophets of God who helped them" (Ezra 5: 2). So I may be able to say what I think is needed, but what capacity do I have to help carry the situation through, because if you could put one word over levitical service it is that they carry burdens.

G.C.B. I have heard it said that feet-washing is not levitical. Is that right?

R.D.P. Well, it says, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13: 14), and I would have thought that that was part of our service to one another. Everything that had to be moved, everything that had to be erected, was done by the Levites here under the direction of the priest, and they come very close to priestly things.

Maybe it is connected with that but as to whether it is a priestly service, I do not know. It seems to me that they cover everything in relation to the prosperity of God's work in His people.

P.M. In the levitical list in Romans 16, two of the most common expressions are 'labourer' and 'fellow-workman'.

R.D.P. Yes, does it say that here?

P.M. Verse 25, "Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-workman". I was thinking of the unofficial side that is to be wrought out not only in a wide way but in our local companies with one another, but it involves labour and work. It is not just sitting back.

R.D.P. And Paul is a great exponent of it. It involves suffering too.

In Corinthians he speaks about his sufferings, how he was shipwrecked and so on, and then he also speaks to the Corinthians, "if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved", 2 Cor 12: 15. It involved all that side of things too, the arduous side, because he had one motive and that was Christ amongst the saints. That is the Levite, I think, and he pursues that. I would like to convey some idea of that as to this precious service where there is a divine numbering in relation to what is levitical, as there is as to what is military.

T.J.H. Would you say the idea of fathers may fit in to what is levitical? You helped us earlier as to the moral qualities of those that are twenty years and upwards, and I wondered if that may compare with what the apostle John says to the young men, "I have written to you, young men, because ye are strong", 1 John 2: 14. There is a moral strength in the Lord as to the younger men, and then he has written to the fathers "because ye have known him that is from the beginning". I wondered if what is levitical in service would be in accord with the knowledge of "him that is from the beginning", and the mind of Him that is from the beginning, the going down mind too?

R.D.P. Well, John has a particular way of writing, and to the young men, he says, "because ye are strong". That might link with what we had earlier, be strong. He says, "Love not the world, nor the things in the world". You can see where the danger is there. I think the fatherly side of things enters into what we are speaking about here because it is a mature thought. You see you can be sixty years old or more like some of us, and immature. It is possible to be that, but I think God looks for a certain maturity and quality that our brother has spoken of, especially in the handling of His people. Here is Timothy, and he says I have no one like him who will care with genuine feelings how the saints get on. Genuine feeling was that he would

hold everything for God, and he would care for them, but it seems it was a rare quality.

R.M.B. He says, “I have *no one* like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on”. I was wondering why it should be that such a feature should be so rare.

R.D.P. I cannot answer that, but I suppose the tendency with us is that because of our natural proclivities we might become very strong on one line or the other. We might be very able to set out the truth, for instance, or we might by nature be one who would be overly sympathetic as to a situation; but someone who cares with genuine feeling how the saints get on is one who has balance, like Paul. He could have things in his heart and while he was writing strongly to the Corinthians he was weeping inside. He says in effect that when he wrote the letter to them he almost regretted it (see 2 Cor 7: 8) and then that he rejoices when he heard they had been grieved to repentance. That to me is someone who cares with genuine feeling. His first thought was for God, but he was almost breaking because he thought he would lose them because of it. That takes a touch of the Spirit of God I think to do that.

R.M.B. I think that helps when you say that his first thought was for God and then for the saints, because Paul gives the reason I suppose in verse 21 why it was rare. Persons had been diverted, had they not?

R.D.P. Yes, “For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ”. What would “the things of Jesus Christ” be?

R.M.B. I do not know, but bearing in mind its context would it be the things that relate to the assembly and the saints?

R.D.P. Yes, I believe it is down here. “Jesus Christ” to me is the Man who was down here. It is not exactly a heavenly view but “the things of Jesus Christ” are what need care and attention down here.

R.W.F. Could we gather from this passage that the Levite is concerned about the progress that the saints are making? The word “get on” means progress, and it comes twice in this section. We can

think of the passage of the children of Israel through the wilderness and we can think of ages and maturity, and that all implies progress, but that is to be promoted among the saints, do you think? Timothy was someone who was ready to do that.

R.D.P. I think what you say is very encouraging. It is a forward-looking thing, how they get on, how they progress. Christianity is a system of movement. We are fortunate because we have a lot of younger brethren and sometimes it is very manifest how they are getting on. You are thankful for that, but then what can I do to facilitate it? That is the Levite, he does that. That is what Timothy does, so Paul sends him to Corinth because he seemed to have a particular touch. He was a man who was weak physically, he was not an heroic sort of man, but he goes there and he seemed to have the means just to encourage and help and care for the saints in a way according to God.

R.W.F. It occurred to me when you were speaking about the age of qualifying to be a Levite being reduced from thirty to twenty-five years, that perhaps it was discovered that the Levites were quick learners, they were making more rapid progress than was expected.

R.D.P. It could be, and that may be so today. We would stress again, these are not literal ages in our day although there is something suggestive about the periods of years I suppose; it is the best of manhood really. That is just the word that has come to me in this meeting. Let us make sure, beloved brethren, that the best of our years are in relation to what is precious to Christ.

D.E.B. Mr Coates says that we mix these two things up. We speak of our own things, and we think of them as our houses and our jobs, and our possessions here, and we think of God's thing as what is up in heaven eternally; but he said, in fact it is the other way round, that our things are what is up there to engage us, and the things on the earth are God's things.

R.D.P. That is very interesting. So that we have nothing here as far as what we can look forward to is concerned, it is all above, but what we do have here is what we have in Christ. Is that what you mean?

It is good sometimes just to test yourself. We are in a New Year, and young people are used to thinking of a new year as opening up new opportunities, perhaps it is good to ask ourselves and say, Where are we really in divine things? How much of it is real to us?

How much are we on the line of promoting the things of Jesus Christ? How much are we ready to put ourselves out in relation to the things of Jesus Christ? It is a very healthy exercise for us. We could make a resolution in relation to this and ask the Spirit to help us keep them.

B.E.S. What would you say about what is laid on the Levites in Numbers 18 about bearing the iniquity of the sanctuary?

R.D.P. I had not thought of that but go on please.

B.E.S. To begin with in that chapter it is the priests, but it widens out to the Levites later on. Is that not something that we all need to take up? We may be aware of things that are not right and we would need to take those on ourselves, would we not? We cannot do that in the way that the Lord does atoningly, but we are intended to feel things as if they were our own, and it is on that basis that the Corinthians were exhorted to deal with what was among them.

R.D.P. Yes they were. I suppose there is quite a link between the settings in Numbers and Corinthians. Things sometimes may seem a little disheartening, but I think what is levitical would go on. He would take the positive things, he would look at what there was and he would make the most of that, a bruised reed he would not break, a smoking flax he would not quench. There is no idea of sweeping issues under the carpet, he would bear the iniquity of it. Men like Ezra and so on, they bore the iniquity in their day, and Nehemiah, but the work went on.

Perhaps we could look at Romans. I had noticed a word in Mr. Taylor's ministry when someone asked whether this section would be the exercises at twenty years of age. He was linking, I believe, with what we have said as to the soldier; and Mr. Taylor's reply was, No I think it is thirty years of age. From that I assume he is linking this section here with what is levitical; and I think the more you think

about it, that is right. It is what is levitical bearing on what is priestly in Romans 12. The heart of Paul comes out as he says, "I beseech you ... to present your bodies a living sacrifice". Then he touches on the body. This is not the body of Christ that we get developed later, as we know, but it is the way things are held together and the features that are there among the saints. He learns to handle a piece of the tabernacle in a sense going on with the lowly; he learns to value and love what there is in there, and it just seems to me that this is a man, or a person, of thirty years of age.

R.H.B. You said you were not thinking exactly of priesthood but what was levitical, but in referring to Timothy his first thought would be for God in caring how the saints got on, and here presenting your bodies a living sacrifice. There is almost a priestly touch in that, is there not? I wondered whether the greatest relationships, that of the priest, what we are as priests to God, He has "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (Rev 1: 6) are what give character to what is levitical and even what is military, as we had in the previous chapter. It is the case in divine things that the greatest relationship is to characterise all the lesser ones, is it not?

R.D.P. I think that is right, and the levitical service, if you read it, was very closely allied with the priest. They were given to the priest as a gift in relation to the serving of the tabernacle. You cannot really separate the Levite and the priest. If you do, I suppose you get real problems. The Levite and the priest were separate people in the gospel of Luke. When they went down the Jericho road, they were separate and they had no power. I think the power is where the two are connected together and you recognise that what is levitical is subservient to what is priestly. We are all constituted priests. I suppose that is the highest thought by way of service.

R.M.B. You did not read the verses, but would verses 6, 7 and 8 give us some idea of the range of levitical service, do you think?

R.D.P. I had the whole chapter in mind really, but we had read a lot, "having different gifts ... the proportion of faith ... he that teaches, in teaching; or he that exhorts, in exhortation; he that gives, in

simplicity”; to me, he finds himself among the tabernacle at least typically and these features, “abhorring evil; cleaving to good ... As regards hope, rejoicing: as regards tribulation, enduring: as regards prayer, persevering: distributing to the necessities of the saint” are to mark his service there. If you want to know what levitical service is in our day it seems to me that Romans 12 is a good guide because there you seem to get all service marked by the feature of Christ, amongst the saints, “not minding high things, but going along with the lowly”.

R.M.B. It has often been pointed out that he starts with what is distinctive, prophecy, for example, the distinctive gifts – but comes right down for example to showing mercy with cheerfulness, which should at least be open to any one of us. It is not easy to see where the line is drawn, is it, between what is distinctive and what is open to all? I suppose in a certain sense does that link with what we have said as to the three levitical families? The first ones might correspond to the Kohathite service, but coming down to Merarite service, do you think, what is within the range of all?

R.D.P. That is very good. They are separated in the typical teaching for our help to see that what the Levite has to handle, ranges from the holy things of God to the details of the lives of the saints. The whole range is there, and he helps with it all. It is his joy and his service and he spends his strength in it. At the end of his service Paul says, “I am already being poured out, and the time of my release is come”, 2 Tim 4: 6. I think that was really one who had spent his entire strength amongst the parts of the tabernacle.

G.C.B. Do you think we should keep in mind that the instruction that goes on in meetings like this, which has levitical character, has in mind that there should be an added note of praise to God in His service. We are thinking of tomorrow morning already, are we not? I thought that it brings the two together, the levitical side and the priestly side, that there should be instruction, and it should be not only formed in our minds but in our affections. So what is levitical is going on at the moment, but in view of a greater note of praise to God.

R.D.P. It is striking that when they go into the land and the tabernacle is pitched permanently, the service of the Levites changes because there is no ark or tabernacle to move any more, and you find that the Levites become over the service of song. I was thinking of what you were saying, they immediately fit into a new role which is in relation to the praise of God.

S.S. I am impressed with the thought of levitical service. It refers to Phoebe as being "a helper of many", Rom 16: 1. It does not have to be anything that is widely known publicly, it can be something that is very simple, "a helper of many".

R.D.P. Yes, very good. There was not much of that character at Corinth, but you are thankful for what there was, and it was in obscurity in a way but she was concerned and she was helping the thing along.

A.G.S. Do you think it results in refreshment too for the saints? I was thinking of Onesiphorus. Paul said, "he has often refreshed me, and has not been ashamed of my chain", 2 Tim 1: 16?

R.D.P. Yes, maybe we would not have thought of that as levitical service, but I think it is. It may be that no one would have known about that unless Paul had mentioned it. It was part of this service of working in relation to the things of God.

J.S.G. In a way that would encourage us to think that perhaps feet-washing in John 13 is levitical. I am not trying to make definitions but it does seem to me that the thought of feet-washing to make the state better and freer for "part with me" is a very precious and higher level of things.

R.D.P. Yes, I have been interested to see that feet-washing in John comes after supper. It is after He rises from supper. Normally the feet-washing, I would have thought, would have been when they first went into the house and that would be related to defilement, but this is afterwards so perhaps that bears on what you say that it is in view of "part with me". It was not, I would think, when you would normally have feet-washing in that house. It comes at a different point.

B.E.S. The note draws attention to the fact that it is questionable whether it is during supper or supper being ended, but in any case, it is not before it which it would normally have been.

R.D.P. We often speak about the removal of defilement, but I think the feet-washing in that scripture has a spiritual and positive thing in view rather than just the removal of defilement. It seems to be something that facilitates the whole spiritual opening up of things. Anyway we could think about that.

E.O.P.M. The reference here from these verses 6, 7 and 8 do not define it, just get on with it. What is levitical, the stress seems to be, is done. Probably where we may have gone wrong in our generation was connecting what was levitical to personalities rather than to what was effected among the saints. What the Lord gives us to do – we know what that is, the Lord will give us a sense of it – let us get on and do it.

R.D.P. Get on and do it, very good, and do not forget to seek His face in the doing of it. But as you say, “having different gifts, according to the grace which has been given to us”, we have been given grace and we have a measure of faith in this chapter, and as having those things it is then a right thing to present our bodies, in relation to the service that is for Him. Then there is so much to be proved of the will of God. I suggest “the will of God” here is not quite the aspect of the will of God as it is seen in Ephesians, but that same will as known here in conditions of adversity: you prove, “the good and acceptable and perfect will of God”.

EAST FINCHLEY

1 January 2005

Key to initials

R.H.Brown; R.M.Brown; D.E.Burr, Colchester; G.C.Bywater, Buckhurst Hill; R.W.Flowerdew, Sunbury; J.S.Gray; T.J.Harvey; P.Martin, Colchester; E.O.P.Mutton, Walton; R.D.Plant, Birmingham;

Q.Poore, Swanage; D.E.Remmington, St Albans; S.Selman, Denton;
A.G.Smith, Bexley; B.E.Surtees, Felixstowe; P.J.Walkinshaw,
Gillingham; M.J.Welch, Sunbury; J.Wright, Havering.

JUDGMENT

Ron Plant

Isaiah 42: 1-4; 1 Corinthians 6: 1-5; Judges 4: 1-7; 5: 6-9; 1 Kings 3: 16-27

I wanted to speak a little about judgment. It is a huge subject in the scriptures and I could not attempt to cover its scope. Clearly there is more than one usage of the word, one being judgment in the sense of what is executive in relation to God, another is the thought of discrimination, and it is this latter which I wanted to speak about.

God in His executive judgment is a wonderful thing to contemplate.

Paul is moved in Romans to say, "how unsearchable his judgments", Rom 11: 33. We may think of judgment as involving execution, and of course it may involve that, but I think judgment according to God, even His executive judgment, for want of a better word, brings out His glory. Even when the dead are judged at the great white throne it will not just be a matter of things being finalised. The infinite judgment of God, the justice of God, will come out at the great white throne. It says that, "books were opened; and another book was opened" (Rev 20: 12); and there seems to be a most intense scrutiny, you may say, even in the matter of that awful final judgment that comes in before the lake of fire, "another book was opened, which is that of life". But I just wanted to illustrate from that that even the executive judgment of God is not just condemnation, but it has something of His glory about it. The Psalms speak of it quite extensively. In one place it says, "thy judgments are a great deep", Ps 36: 6. You think of things that happen in the world, and we have to leave them. I think we all find it difficult to know how to speak of this disaster of the tsunami in Asia, but we do know as Abraham says, "will not the Judge of all the earth do right?", Gen 18: 25.

I wanted to speak about discriminative judgment. I think you can see that judgment in men is flawed. The whole subject in the world is flawed. There is witness of it on every hand where things are overturned in man's judicial system, and of course that is but the

tip of the iceberg really, because man made a decision long ago to abandon the great principle of judgment in that he chose to exclude God from his thoughts, and as a result of that every judgment of man has become flawed. It culminated in the death of Christ. The travesty at the trial of Jesus stands recorded even to the present day, that even despite the witnesses to what He was, the sentence was carried out so unjustly in relation to the Lord Jesus. What a travesty it was, the judgment of men. I suppose Rome prided itself upon its justice and yet think of the travesty of that day when they smote Him on the face. Men smote the Lord of glory on the face. Even at the great white throne men will never be smitten in the face, but they did that to Christ. I have thought that part of the sufferings of Christ was expressed so fully in the scripture that was expounded by Philip to the eunuch when it says, "In his humiliation his judgment has been taken away", Acts 8: 33. It is slightly different from Isaiah 53 from which it is taken where it says, "He was taken from oppression and from judgment" (v 8). But in that very affecting part of the scriptures in the Acts speaking of Christ, it says, "In his humiliation his judgment has been taken away". Have you thought of that, beloved. There is one thing, you may say, above all others that the Lord Jesus merited if man would refuse all else – a judgment in relation to the perfection of that life that had been here before men; His judgment was denied Him. I think it is part of the sufferings of Christ. Elsewhere it says He "gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously; who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 23,24. But think of the sorrow and the humiliation that was heaped upon the head of the Lord Jesus amidst the physical abuse He suffered, that the Man who had filled out upon the earth God's will and demonstrated manhood in perfection before a holy God was denied a right judgment. I think a poet says something like that, 'Alone in the hall of decision where judgment was taken away'. I hope you are affected by these things. He went to His death, that cruel death, without even the truth spoken publicly as to that life of infinite perfection known to God and kindness to men, and only a thief and a centurion accord a right judgment in relation to the life of Christ. A man who had lived a wicked life says,

“this man has done nothing amiss” (Luke 23: 41), and the centurion says, “In very deed this man was just”, Luke 23: 47. Those were the only words really that were spoken to reflect a right judgment as to the life of the Lord Jesus. What a time it was. That tribunal will yet have to appear before God’s judgment of course. But these are things which have entered into the judgment of man.

I believe that one of the fruits of the Spirit coming is that there should be amongst the people of God the spirit of judgment in a right sense. I think we would all acknowledge that we are very tested by this matter of judgment. We know and I am sure we are humbled by the fact that as far as discrimination in judgment is concerned we very often find that this one thinks this and this one thinks that, and so on, and yet we have the presence here of the Spirit of God. It says in John’s gospel, “having come, he will bring demonstration to the world, of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”, John 16: 8. One of the things the Holy Spirit has brought is judgment. I am sure there would be more extensive interpretations of that scripture, but one of the things that has been brought by the Holy Spirit is judgment. Now I know the scripture goes on to give an explanation for it, because the world is judged, and so on, but I think that one of the benefits of the Holy Spirit is the capacity of right judgment, and I believe that it is quite a testing matter for us, as to our part in it.

I thought I would read first of all in Isaiah 42 because it prophetically refers to Christ, it refers to Him in his character. It says, “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment according to truth”. Is that not affecting, beloved? I believe we should be exercised every one of us, including myself, as to our judgment in the way of discrimination and seek God’s help and the help which there is in the Holy Spirit to that end. Judgment was denied to Christ. What was true of Him, the true assessment of the worth of that Man was denied to the Saviour here. It was part of His sufferings, and I believe that we should, as persons who have the Spirit, seek to be

marked in an increasing way by right judgment, discrimination in judgment; I just put my exercise before the brethren as to that. I believe if we are to be helped in it, the first thing we must look to is Christ. You should always start with Christ. I hope the young ones remember that. If you do not know where to start, start with Jesus, because God has started with Him and He will finish with Him, "he shall bring forth judgment to the nations". Now I cannot explain the detail and the full extent to which it reaches out to, perhaps beyond the day in which the Lord Jesus was here and probably beyond the day in which we are, but it expresses the perfectness of Christ, the Servant. What impresses me from this scripture is the perfect judgment of Christ. It says, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street". You get the sense of quietness about the Person of the Lord Jesus. Think of what He was when He was there. You may say that there were situations that were presented to Him where it seemed manifest, and obvious, what was needed. Well, I think we should be careful of what seems obvious.

You may say there were times in the life of Jesus where it appeared clear what should have been done. Think of the woman in John 8 who they brought to Him, taken in adultery. They put her in the midst before Jesus and they say, "this woman has been taken in the very act, committing adultery. Now in the law Moses has commanded us to stone such", (vv 4,5). You say, what can you say? What would we have said? Perhaps we would have given a fairly quick response in a situation like that. What does the Lord Jesus do? It says, "having stooped down, wrote with his finger on the ground". I do not know that anybody yet can explain to me what the perfection of those movements was. Think of that stoop. You may say, there was a situation that seemed so easy to resolve, that everyone could resolve there. But His judgments are perfect, are they not? He stoops down and writes with His finger on the ground and then He says, "Let him that is without sin among you first cast the stone at her". I only mention these things because there is a calmness about Christ. There is not always a calmness about the way that we move to judgment, to discriminate. It says, "He shall not

cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street". I think we should learn from the Lord Jesus, we should study Him. We can study Him in every part of His pathway and His life and His manhood and His service. God says here, typically of Him, "Behold my servant ... mine elect in whom my soul delighteth". Think of what the Lord Jesus was here for thirty years, thirty years in obscurity with just brief glimpses of what was there. It says, "I will put my Spirit upon him". We have been reading about the ark and the tabernacle system. The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth was at the centre of it. But if you could have seen underneath the gold you would have found it was made of wood. I believe the wood represented the distinctive manhood of the Lord Jesus as seen by God. He says, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth! I will put my Spirit upon him". These are wonderful things. You can feast your heart upon Christ. You can allow the beauty of that Man to come into your heart. Think of your own imperfections, and of the way that you fall so short, and then you turn to Christ and you find in Him perfection, perfection in a Man.

I love what is said of Him, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street", and I would like to suggest that as we learn from Christ we will learn perhaps in judgment not to be quite so precipitate as we sometimes seem to be. "A bruised reed shall he not break". Think of the woman of Sychar's well, a woman of the city with a long shameful history of broken marriages behind her and her dubious history, and you might say, there is nothing there really for God, it is the story of a ruined life. I like to think of the Lord Jesus there, "A bruised reed shall he not break". I wonder if we have ever broken a bruised reed. The Lord Jesus would not break that woman. He could have condemned her, He could have done so before He said anything to her, but He draws out from her all her hopes and all the disappointments of life, all hopes for the future, all that she had that surrounded that lonely life of hers. He drew it all out from her and then He puts in that statement, "Go, call thy husband, and come here", John 4: 16. That was the touchstone of her life. What a wonderful thing that the Lord could

discern that. I wonder if we could do that amongst the brethren. If we are to take up what is levitical we need to learn to value the work of God, however feeble it may be, even if it is almost extinguished.

He will not break the bruised reed. I would love to be something like the Saviour in relation to that as I move among the saints of God.

What a thing if we could learn from Christ how not to break the reeds, but find something that is of God, recognise that it is precious, hold it and nurture it; "and smoking flax shall he not quench: until he bring forth judgment". It was always truth with the Lord Jesus. May there always be truth with us too. But I just commend this scripture to us all because it seems to suggest to me the calmness and the measured way that the Lord Jesus served in His service here.

The scripture in Corinthians is striking because it is God's will that the saints are to be involved in judgment. It says towards the end of Revelation as to Babylon, "for God has judged your judgment upon her", Rev 18: 20. It is a remarkable thing that. When you think of man generally who is so awry in his judgments of the world, but of the saints as having the Spirit, it says of them, "God has judged your judgment upon her". So in Corinthians it says, "Do ye not then know that the saints shall judge the world?", and then goes on, "Do ye not know that we shall judge angels?". Do you not find these things daunting, beloved brethren, and feel tested by it? I think we need to be before the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit as to knowing more about discriminating judgment. I do really for myself. But what a state of things was present at Corinth. They had plenty of knowledge, they had all doctrine, they came short in no gift, they had tremendous ability in the place. It was a place of substantial numbers and yet the apostle has to say to them, as speaking about this particular issue of prosecuting a matter before the unjust and not before the saints, "are ye unworthy of the smallest judgments?" What a rebuke this was to this assembly in Corinth, "Do ye not know that we shall judge angels? and not then matters of this life?" He speaks to the Corinthians of their qualifications. They had received the Spirit and yet here they were unable to judge even the smallest matters. It is a testing thing this scripture, not only for them but also for

ourselves. Why was it they were so awry? The previous chapter records the evil that was allowed there, the public evil of 1 Corinthians 5 which the apostle had addressed so faithfully. You wonder what it was that had happened at Corinth. What are the principles that we need for judgment? The Lord Jesus says somewhere, responding to a questioner, as to what was the great commandment in the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul", and then He says, "the second is like it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law and the prophets hang", Matt 22: 37-40. I believe every matter of judgment should be judged on the basis of those two things, loving God with all your heart and loving you neighbour as yourself. The Lord says the whole law hangs upon it. But I just read this scripture in Corinthians to show what a state they were in. He then says, "set those to judge who are little esteemed in the assembly". I believe there is something in that for us. Not the little esteemed generally, but the "little esteemed in the assembly". The company at Corinth had become so impressed with its own greatness and the persons in it and it seems that some there were little esteemed in the assembly. Perhaps that is something we should think about. Corinth was a place which had almost gone to the brink, it had almost got to a point where it was a question of what would happen there but there was still something there in the place, still some capable of right judgment.

I read of Deborah in Judges because I think she sets out right judgment. Judges is an interesting book, even the very name of it seems to tie in with our subject. Why do you have the book of Judges and the book of Joshua? Joshua more or less describes similar events to the book of Judges. One difference I think is that the book of Joshua is written from the standpoint of the land entered and conquered under the spiritual leadership of Joshua. But in Judges spiritual leadership is gone, and I think it is a book that is written to show that in such circumstance we need help as to discrimination in judgment. Judges is not written historically. For instance, you get the death of Joshua in the first chapter, and then

you find Joshua is still alive in chapter 2, but I believe it is to develop the spirit of right judgment among the saints, and it seems to that end that it is essential that we “know war by learning it” (Judg 3: 2), the conflict is on. It is a question of how things will be maintained in a time when spiritual and prominent leadership has gone, and how we will be maintained. And one of the things is by right discrimination of judgment. As you read the history of all these persons, you can mark the decline that comes in, but Deborah stands out in this dark day in which the people were under twenty years of oppression. It says, “she dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim; and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment”, a remarkable scripture. It seems that there was something in this woman that was respected in relation to judgment, and I wonder how that came about. She was one who seemed to remain calm amidst all the hubbub of the day and during the oppression of Jabin king of Canaan. Although she lived in that time it says she dwelt under her own palm-tree which is suggestive in scripture of victory. She was not, you may say, tossed about by the events of the day but lived where she was superior to it. I wonder whether we are able to do that. What is the first thing you do when some matter comes up?

Let us be honest with ourselves, what do you feel like doing? You feel like ringing up Mr. So-and-so to see what he thinks about it.

What about nurturing our own palm-tree? It does not even say it was her husband's, Lapidoth, it says it was *her* palm-tree. I trust that as the exercises of the truth develop with us we grow in spiritual stature so that there is that there which is capable of judgment. It is her *own*, she had a judgment of the state of things that existed. It was a day of great exploits. In the previous chapter you find Shamgar and Ehud, men who did remarkable exploits, and perhaps we are attracted by that. Perhaps you may say that is something that dazzles us in the present day, but Deborah was a woman of discernment, and she discerned according to her song in chapter 5 that the real problem in Israel was that “the roads were unused, and the travellers on highways went by crooked paths. The villages ceased in Israel” (vv 6,7). She discerns not what was in the

headlines of the time, the oppression of Israel by Hazor, and so on, but she discerns the fact that the very infrastructure of Israel was breaking down. You get that in her song. I would like to have a calm judgment as to the real issues of the day and then to act appropriately as to it. She rises up and she speaks to Barak, "Hath not Jehovah the God of Israel commanded", she reverts to the commandment of God. I do not want to go into the detail of this interesting section, but just to draw attention to this one fact that she had become a woman of substance, and she was one who had a judgment, and she had calmness in that judgment, and she was not distracted by things that were all around, and she was influential. I just commend her to all of us, that Deborah the prophetess is I think someone who had discriminative judgment in the things of God, and she was used for salvation and blessing. I wonder if we were asked to give a judgment of things amongst God's people at the present time what we would say. Would we only be able to give an account of the headlines or could we see where the solution to matters lay? She was concerned and she acts and acts in relation to a judgment that had been developed with God under what is called her own palm-tree.

I just finish with that scripture in 1 Kings 3. Solomon asked for "discernment to understand judgment". The Lord was pleased with him that he had asked for this and granted it to him. He had asked God for it. I suppose that is one thing we could do simply is ask God to help us as to our judgments. And Solomon is immediately tested by this well known situation which brings out Solomon's wisdom in this difficult matter. I read it all because of the great detail given which sets out that things are repeated over and over again, and this claim and that claim. How familiar I suppose we can be in our assemblies with this claim and this counter-claim, and this statement and that statement. And the sad thing is it involved a living child here. Solomon's wisdom brings out the true mother, and the child is saved, but what a way he takes. His judgment and discrimination was there, and I think you may say he operated on the basis that he knew that the true mother would come to light. What

he used was the sword, which has often been linked with the word of God. It is a very powerful weapon, the word of God, and he uses it; but his discernment and his calculation was this, that the true mother in this sorrow, the *true* mother, would put the life of the child before her own claims, and I believe that is something we might think about because true motherhood would be ready to die before the child died. That feature identified the true mother and brings the resolution. "Give this one the living child ... she is its mother". What a difficult question this was, what wisdom was in Solomon, he got it from God. May we each one of us know this.

This is feebly spoken, I recognise this, let us be exercised as to this matter of discrimination and judgment that what is of God may be preserved among his people. May it be so, for His Name's sake.

EAST FINCHLEY

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