

Chapter 3 Prisoners in the Promise Land

The Old Testament was given as a type and warning to us to learn from.

1 Corinthians 10:11 says, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.”

The Promise Land in the Old Testament was the land of Canaan. It was not a place that was perfect, but a place where Israel’s enemies dwelt; a place of war and struggle. Our Promise Land is not Heaven, it is the here and now, inheriting God’s promises in our lives as Christians. Our enemies are still here and can still take us prisoners, even in our promise land! Just because we are Christians we are not immune from Satan’s prisons.

In the Old Testament the Israelites were prisoners in their Promise Land. Christians can be, and are, prisoners to Satan and they do not know it. We can have strongholds that keep us from fulfilling our God given purpose in life. A stronghold is a mindset that accepts as inevitable or unchangeable, something that is contrary to the revealed will of God.¹

Satan could no longer hold God’s people in famine, so he tried to hold them in Egyptian slavery. He tried, again, to wipe them out in the desert on their way to the Promise Land, but he could not stop them at the Jordon River, nor at Jericho. But when they got into the Promise Land, he got them at a little town called Ai. Why? Because of their own sin. It was an internal enemy, not a visible military power (Joshua 7).

The Israelites were still prisoners after they had reached their promise land!

“Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds² which *are* in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD” (Judges 6:1-6).

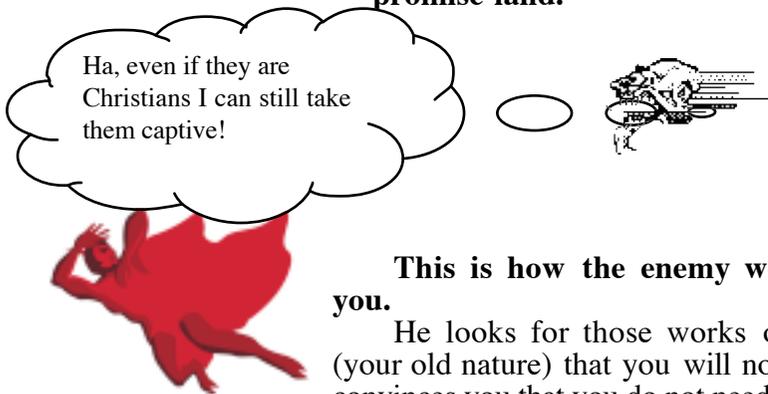
¹ “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

For hundreds of years, the Israelites called out to God and He delivered them in their pain. Then they got into idolatry again and became prisoners to something else. Why?

“And I said to you, I am the LORD your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. *But you have not obeyed My voice (Word)*” (Judges 6:10).

In Judges 6 God came to Gideon in his situation. The Hebrews were in their Promise Land, but every time they planted seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites would raid the area and stomp out the crops. They would steal the seed just as Satan steals the seed of the Word of God. So these children of God were actually prisoners to their enemy, even though they were in the Promise Land.

The Old Testament shows God’s people living as prisoners in the promise land.



This is how the enemy works to trap you.

He looks for those works of your flesh (your old nature) that you will not forsake. He convinces you that you do not need to live on the Word of God, but that you can make it for yourself. He convinces you that you do not need to use God’s Kingdom and His system of bearing fruit. Unforgiveness is a major invitation for the devil to operate in your life.

After a while he latches on to those works and you become deceived by this demon. You are not demon possessed, but you are demon influenced. These become strongholds and you feel hopeless. You are a Christian in God’s promise land, but you are a prisoner like the people in the Old Testament. You are no longer a candidate for waters to flow out of you to help others. Satan has stopped up the River, but you have given him permission.

What are some Prisons that Satan can keep us in?

“Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Whoever practices sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34).

Sickness, disease.

Continual lack of finances.

Being unloved. If we have not received unconditional love from our parents, we are in a prison.

Selfishness, or self-love is the opposite of real love. This is thinking that you are the center of the world and all things revolve around you.

Low self-esteem - a sense of unworthiness and defeat. We are not to receive our sense of who we are from anywhere or anyone except God and His Word. Human nature and the world attempts to paste a false sense of who we are onto us. Either we feel we are superior and prideful, or we feel unworthy with shame and inferiority. A good way to battle this is to know that God lives inside of you, and everywhere you go is blessed because you are carrying God with you. You bless everyone you meet because you are a clay vessel filled with the glory of God. What others think of you does not make you who you are. Your job or vocation does not identify you. When you go to your job, you are giving it dignity. When Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, it was like cleaning toilets, but because God was doing it, washing feet has become an honorable thing.

Widows and Orphans. James 1:27. God puts special emphasis on the plight of widows (this definition includes divorced women) and orphans (this definition includes children of divorce). It has to do with having no authority, no covering, and no fathering figure. It involves being left without defense, without an advocate in the ultimate sense. The Old Testament is full of warnings to Israel to take care of the fatherless and to care for the widows. It should be no less for the Church today.

We all need security, and being either a widow or an orphan is the ultimate in the lack of security. I know people who have had a difficult time recovering from becoming a widow or an orphan. As believers, we are to represent the heart of God towards widows and orphans. His heart is to look out for them, to give them special comfort and to provide for them. He is their covering, He is their security. If you have been this type of a “prisoner,” you need to know that God says in James 1:27 that true worship, true “religion” and the fear of God involves showing His heart of love and care towards widows and orphans. This is a very serious statement by God, and you need to know how much He is interested in and cares for you!

“In His holy dwelling God *is* the father of the fatherless, and the judge of the widows” (Psalms 68:5).

Mammon - trusting in the world, other people, or anything else for your material needs, rather than God.

Abuse - So many people have been abused, sexually and in other ways.

Self-righteousness is a very big one.

Unforgiveness is a major one.

Other enemies are guilt, moral sins, sexual sin, bitterness, gossip, anger, compromising integrity and truth, and the list goes on.

Addictions - There are too many to name, but they are a substitute for God’s love through the Holy Spirit.

Many are trapped in generational curses such as the inability to express love and kindness, the slavery mindset, being a people pleaser, being a perfectionist or performance oriented for self-esteem. Many of these areas manifest themselves in broken or compromised relationships, the inability to live in peace, the inability to be content.

Witchcraft or the control of others. You may be the victim or the perpetrator.

Guilt and shame from your past. Jesus gives us a fresh start and wipes away our past.

However, I believe that one of the most widespread issues is rejection.

I believe that rejection is the root of hundreds of other problems. We need the unconditional acceptance from our parents when we are young. Broken relationships with our fathers is a widespread cause of bondages to drugs and other addictions.

We need acceptance from our peers, our spouses, etc. In today's society, broken people inflict damage on others through rejection and it spreads from generation to generation. We are not able to pass love on without having first received it. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us." God's remedy for rejection is two fold:

1) He took our rejection and bore it for us. Isaiah 53:3, says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

2) He accepts us unconditionally with His great love! Ephesians 1:6, says, "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

Jesus is not condemning us for these areas. Jesus wants to set us free. This is His mission. But we need to be honest with ourselves, drop our pride, and be prepared to cooperate with the healing process of getting free.

Notice what was the bottom line and root cause of the bondage of these people.

"And I said to you, I am the LORD your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. *But you have not obeyed My voice (Word)*" (Judges 6:10).

Gideon is our example of a prisoner that became free and even freed his people!

Gideon bore fruit for God. He was working hard at making life work with his own power, but he ended up with failure, low self-esteem and hopelessness. He was hiding in his wine vat underground in order to avoid the Midianites who would come in hordes and wipe out the crops and steal the livestock. No matter how hard he and his people tried, they could not

overcome the enemy. The Midianites were those enemies that beat down God's pastures and robbed the seed. In the same way today's Midianites, demons, rob the Word of God to keep us from being fruitful. Notice that they waited until Israel had sown their crops, then they swarmed down to destroy them. They came as grasshoppers. Israel was greatly impoverished.

What did God do? What did Gideon do?

The primary lesson that I want us to learn is that God taught Gideon to hear His voice!

Watch and see how the relationship between God and Gideon developed from glory to glory. See how Gideon cooperated with God's leading, and how God provided the grace and the power. Gideon learned to obey His voice. That is really all he had to do. That is really any of us need to do. Notice, God did not say, "You have not obeyed My laws or My precepts or principles." He said, "You have not obeyed My voice." One's voice is personal compared to laws, commands and precepts. Voice is personal it is face to face. It is powerful to hear God's voice. It really does not matter what He says, just as long as His voice can be heard.

The question is: How desperate are you to hear God's voice? How desperate are you to obey His voice.

The end of the story is that Gideon was used by God to motivate a victory and freedom for people, not just for himself. As Isaiah 61 shows, he went from prisoner to priest. He went from a sufferer to a comforter. He turned his junk into jewels. He took the path of the cross to the grave to the resurrection.

In this study we are going to see how God worked, and still works to turn our prisons into freedom. We will also see how Gideon responded to God so that we may follow his steps for our own lives.

Follow Gideon's path in Judges chapter 6.

6:1 He was a victim of his forefather's idol worship. His people were in bondage to poverty due to the past 200 years of idol worship. The first thing we need to do is to forgive those that put us into these prisons. Without this forgiveness, as an act of our will, the rest of the process will not work. If we cannot find forgiveness, then confess that as sin to the Lord and His forgiveness will work through us.

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sown their crops, and then they swarmed down to destroy them. They came as grasshoppers. Israel was greatly impoverished.

6:8 God spoke to the Israelites. In God's mercy, He heard the cries of the Israelites and sent a prophet. His mercy endures forever. The prophet told the Israelites that God was their God, He had delivered them from bondage once and that the reason they were in bondage again (this time in their own Promise Land) was that they did not obey the voice of God (The Word of God). If we do not LIVE on the Word of God daily, we will surely become slaves and prisoners to our enemies. There is no way around it.

6:12 God spoke to Gideon personally. The angel of the Lord, the personal representative of God, came to Gideon. The Amplified Bible commentary says that this was an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. He called Gideon a "Mighty Man of Valor." Why did He use these words to someone who was acting like a coward, who had no self-esteem and was threshing wheat in hiding so that his enemies could not spot him? God always deals with us this way; He sees what we will become. He calls those things that are not as though they are (Romans 4:17). He looks not at what we are, but at what we can be in Him. These are faith words talking.

6:13 Gideon was honest with God. He told Him just how he felt; "If God is with us, then why are we suffering so much?" A lot of people ask these questions. If God is love, why do good people suffer? If I have been serving God, then why am I going through this tough time now?" He asked God "where are all the miracles that you performed with our forefathers in Egypt?" He felt forsaken by God.

6:18-21 God revealed Himself to Gideon as the covenant making God. He showed Gideon Who He is, and He showed Gideon his real position as a covenant partner with God. So often God answers our questions with a revelation of Who He is!

Gideon brought his best to God. Gideon took up his cross. The price of the goat and home baked bread that Gideon brought was extreme for someone in poverty circumstances. Not only that, Gideon cooked soup!

Gideon saw the Cross of Jesus. It could have just been an expensive meal, but God turned it into a covenant meal. In Leviticus 2:1 the meat or meal offering was to be burnt on the altar by the priest. The fact that the Angel of The Lord burned up Gideon's offering with the tip of His staff was a sign of the covenant. I believe that in Gideon's Hebrew mind, he saw a blood covenant that day between himself and God. He saw God exchange power, name and circumstances with him.

The Blood Covenant changes your family, your name, and your inheritance. Gideon received God's name, God took Gideon's name. Mighty Man of Valor: was the Lord's name, defeated weak one was Gideon's name. They swapped.

6:22 Gideon could hear God speak even better now. This was Gideon's main attribute. He took the time to build a relationship and

continued to hear God speak. Notice that the Lord had departed in verse 21 yet in verse 23 the Lord spoke. This represents a progressive relationship between Gideon and the Lord.

6:23-24 *He had the peace of God because of the Cross* (Jehovah-shalom). You can be in terrible circumstances but if you have the peace of God you can overcome anything! “And let the peace of God rule [as an umpire] in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful” (3:15 – comment from Amp. Bible).

6:25-32 *Gideon had to tear down family idols.* After experiencing the Cross of Jesus we need to tear down the altars. Idolatry is based upon one simple thing; SELF-LOVE. This is more of taking up our cross. Idols are not as obvious today as they were in Old Testament times. An idol is anything that makes you walk in the flesh and not in the Spirit. The most accurate test is what or who do you worship? The most accurate test for worship is whom you obey: Your reasoning, your flesh, another person, or the Spirit of God and the Word of God? Walking in the flesh is obeying your flesh (natural desire) and walking in the Spirit is obeying the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. To pull down idols, one must be in contact with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit so one can cease obeying his/her natural desires.

Like in Romans 12:1 after all of the mercy that God had shown to our lost condition, after the giving of the Cross and all of the grace in Romans chapters 1 through 11, He then says, “In view of all these mercies, offer your own body a living sacrifice.” In other words, tear down your idols as Gideon did. Offer all of your faculties to God; give Him your body to be an earthen vessel filled with God as Adam was supposed to be. Be willing to be “different” for God; do not be conformed to this world system.

6:34 *After tearing down the idols, Gideon was clothed [possessed] with the Spirit of God.* He had the power of God. Gideon had the sense, faith and abandonment to obey God and stop obeying the reasoning and natural circumstances in his life. When we turn from idols we will find the result is always more of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The first thing that happened is that the enemy attacked. When we tear down spiritual idols, we can expect a manifestation of the battle in the natural.

6:36-40 *He learned to fellowship with God at a very strong level of trust in spite of circumstances (perhaps even because of them).*

Gideon bore fruit for the Kingdom of God. He became one of history's greatest deliverers of God's people. Read Judges 7 through 8:21 for the battle. God turned a defeated man with hopeless circumstances into a great historic victory because of two things: 1) The Cross, and 2) Gideon's appreciation of the Cross to the extent that he would go all out for God and make Him the focus of all of his life, not just first or second place, and Gideon's cooperation to tear down idols and strongholds.

In spite of the fact that Gideon had been subject to family sins, curses and the worshipping of idols, the Angel of the Lord brought the Cross on

the scene with the sacrifice, and was saying, “There is no way out for you sonny boy, except that I take on the curse and sin that you have coming to you. By virtue of this covenant, I am taking your sin, your family curses, your generational sins passed down and results of idol worship both by you and your ancestors. I will take your name (your identity) which is ‘cursed by God’ and you will be called by My Name, O’ Mighty Man of Valor.” Actually Gideon means “cutter down, hewer.”

God met Gideon where he was. God did not require him to be someone he was not. But God had faith in him. Gideon learned that you make it not in your own strength but by

He learned about fruit. He learned that he was a Prisoner in the Promise Land. He learned how to be intimate with God, The Flowing River, and he learned Who God is. He learned to Sit, Walk and Stand. The end result was fruit for the Kingdom of God.

Be desperate to hear God’s voice.

Do whatever is necessary to arrange you life to hear God speak. Take time, more and more time, in the Word. Listen to tapes, read good authors, speak the Word, soak in the Word. Take time to be quite with God. Listen more and talk less. Study the Flowing River as a way to hear God’s voice more and more. Change your surroundings from time to time, escape from the familiar.

Allow God to speak to your heart!