

Chariots of Iron



Winston Churchill said in a speech in 1940, “Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival.” If only Israel had a leader in the period of the Judges like Moses or Joshua or Caleb to remind them that the victory was already theirs – all they had to do was reach out and claim it.

In the adult Bible class Sunday we called attention to Israel’s downward spiral as it is summarized in Judges 1. While many of the later stages of moral and national decline such as outright disobedience and defeat at the hands of God’s enemies are appalling, the most dangerous stage is the first – failing to believe that God either could or would do what he said. The first, and most dangerous, stage of decline is a lack of faith. Judges 1:1-18

presents a picture of Judah’s obedience and victory. Then, 1:19 says, “And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he (NASU, NIV, NKJV says “they”) could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.” This may not seem like such a terrible crime on the surface. After all, it makes sense that where the enemy was weaker (i.e. in the hill country) Israel prevailed; but on the plain the enemy’s chariot force was seemingly impenetrable. Let’s get some background.

God warned the Exodus generation that these kinds of fears would creep into their thinking and paralyze them (Deut. 7:17-21). He said, “If you say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?’ you shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt...” Israel had already experienced the terror of being pursued by the almighty chariot (Ex. 14:5-7). They had also already experienced that no trial is so great that God cannot overcome it (Ex. 14:24-25; 15:4).

Later, after the Exodus generation had died in the wilderness, Joshua lead Israel into the Promised Land. He told the house of Joseph not to worry about an enemy that was better equipped because Israel had something the Canaanites did not: The Lord was fighting for them (Josh 17:14-18). He told the people, “For you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong.”

It is for this reason that Judah made a terrible mistake in Judges 1:19 when, “...they [supposedly] could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.” Whether we are talking about our individual lives, our families, our congregations or even our nation, the beginning of decline does not start with “I won’t” – it starts with “I can’t.” When we say “I can’t” we are admitting that God is not a part of our formula for how things get done.

We find this kind of thinking in all areas of our lives, homes and congregations; but the one area where I think I see it the most is in God’s ability to overcome sin. We even pray sometimes, “Father, we know that we will sin, and when we do we ask your forgiveness.” We rationalize that we are just being realistic. We say, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:15, 19). Get “your sin” and put it in the front of your mind. Maybe it’s internet pornography,

a short temper, a habit of using foul language, etc. Whatever it is be thinking about it. If we pressed the issue and asked, "Why don't we just give up our sin and stop?" we might come to two fundamental answers. One group will honestly admit, "Because I don't really want to." The other might say, "Because I can't. My sin is a chariot of iron and I simply CAN NOT overcoming it."

When we say "I can't" we are probably not far from the truth. But God can; and when this reality escapes our thinking decline is sure to follow. Consider how Deborah viewed overcoming an enemy force of 900 chariots of iron (Judges 4:2-3, 13-16). She said, "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?" Later, "And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak...And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army..."

Instead of "I can't," what if I approached every aspect of my Christianity and my responsibility towards God in the light of these words, "Does not the lord go out before you!" "Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival." Victory in Jesus!

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