

THRESHING

Threshing is an ancient process used to separate grain from the straw. The process was usually performed on a threshing floor which was out in the open and usually on top of a hill. This was important so that the wind would assist in the separation process. The surface of the floor was generally flint or rock. The work of threshing and the threshing floor are defined in the following way.

Threshing -- removing the kernel of grain from its stalk. Different methods were used to accomplish this. The most basic method, beating the grain, was used by farmers with a small amount of grain to thresh. These farmers sometimes would walk their animals over the grain to thresh it. For larger operations, animal-drawn machines were used. The most common of these was the threshing sledge (Is.41:15). Made of planks with rocks or metal attached to its underside, the sledge was pulled back and forth over the grain. Weight was added by using stones or the weight of the driver and his children.¹⁸

Threshing Floor -- a flat surface prepared for the threshing of grain. The threshing floor was usually located at the edge of a village, frequently on a large flat rock outcropping. When no flat rock was available, the threshing floor would be prepared by levelling the ground and pounding the earth to create a hard surface.¹⁹

After being harvested, the sheaves of wheat, with the chaff, were brought to the threshing floor, loosened and arranged in a circle on it. Oxen would then be driven repeatedly in a circle over the sheaves of wheat to trample out the kernels of wheat. An alternative method of threshing was to use a drag sled or cart that was weighted down. Sharp pieces of stone, in some cases sharp metal, were fixed to the bottom. Where there were small quantities of sheaves, they were usually beaten with a stick or flail.

After the threshing was completed, the threshed grain was thrown into the air usually with a winnowing fan (tool for tossing the grain into the wind) to enable the wind to blow away the chaff and allow the valuable grain to fall separately to the threshing floor. This process was called winnowing. The wind would also blow away the dust that had accumulated through the threshing process. After the threshing and winnowing, the grain was finally passed through a sieve to remove any dirt before finally being taken away to be stored in a barn.

God completes His work on a spiritual threshing floor. This threshing floor is anywhere where the Holy Spirit is at work in people's lives. It could be at evangelical meetings, church services, small groups or individuals wherever they may. That's the nature of spirituality, it has no physical boundaries and as Jesus said in John's gospel, the Holy Spirit is like the wind that blows and no one knows where it goes. Spiritual threshing can take place in the lives of people by the work of the Holy Spirit, anywhere, anytime.

The separating work of the Holy Spirit on individual people occurs at two levels. The first is His work of convicting people and drawing them to be reconciled to God, the second is the separation of the carnality and worldliness that still resides in each Christian. The purpose of this second work of separation is the sanctification or

purification of the believer so that they become holy and more godly in their daily living. The threshing of people's lives is necessary for us to be drawn to God and for us to then spiritually mature. People are brought onto God's spiritual threshing floor from the world (the field) to be exposed to the work of the Holy Spirit with much that has to be overcome in their life. Even after one of these people decides to believe, apart from new spiritual life, they are still much the same as they were when they lived as unbelievers. There is a considerable amount of what God sees as chaff (living as part of the world) even in the life of a believer and the Holy Spirit needs to perform His second work of threshing.

Each believer needs to be threshed to separate the spiritual from the carnal. The worldly mind has focused on the physical world and their fleshly life and is carnal. Their emotions with love for themselves and the love of the things of the world, are carnal. So also is their strong, independent, self-seeking will. It has never yielded to God to allow His will to be done in their life. However, after being reconciled to God, their heart that was once hardened towards God is now soft and able to be changed to love God and put Him first in their life. A renewed inner man is required, one that lives for God and not themselves.

As the carnal (chaff) falls away, Christ starts to be revealed in the believer's life in an ever increasing way. As each person turns to God with all their heart, the Holy Spirit does His work of threshing them with the intention of ensuring that the self-life of the Christian dies and the believer's Christ-like life is raised up.

When Christians are judged at the judgment seat of Christ, all that is chaff will be burnt and only that part of our life that is of true spiritual worth will remain safe and result in us receiving a reward from God. For the true Christian, it is the part of their life that has been built on the sure foundation of Christ and built by the work of the Holy Spirit that will be the gold, silver, precious stones, which will endure Christ's test of fire and receive a reward. All that has resulted from man's selfish and self-willed ways (wood, hay, straw), will be consumed by the fire.

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

There will be varying degrees to which believers have allowed the Holy Spirit to thresh them so that their life is lived according to God's will. These people will be saved from the unquenchable fire and on that day any remaining chaff in their lives will be burnt. The words, thoughts and actions flowing from obedience to the Holy Spirit will be what remains and be what they receive a reward for. If a true believer has spent most of their life for themselves and not been obedient to the Holy Spirit, all that was lived in disobedience will be burnt and the rewards will be few. Those who have faithfully been obedient to God to the best of their ability will be rewarded for the faithful way they have lived their life.

God has plans for the people He makes spiritually alive to Him. These are the ones who have turned to Him and are open to being spiritually prepared for heaven. He has set His heart upon them and these are His chosen ones who have made a commitment to live only for Him. His desire for these people is that on the day they get tested by spiritual fire, most of their life will come through the fire without being burnt and their rewards will be great.

Achieving the spiritual maturity God requires can often mean that we go through various tests and difficulties. God's hope is that these tests and difficulties will result in the spiritual growth that He wants and make us holy like He is. The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us that as believers we are God's children and as a result of His love for us He will correct us so that we can become holy like Him, separated and set apart for Him.

Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: " My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. " 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

All people who are on the spiritual threshing floor are threshed using various threshing instruments. Only God knows our hearts and He is the only one who can choose the appropriate threshing instruments. In some cases the instruments applied must be heavy and harsh to remove the wheat but in other cases the instrument must be gentle to prevent damage to the grain. God knows what instrument is best for each of us at any particular time of our Christian life. He knows what it will take to shake the wheat free from the chaff so that when the time comes He can put the grain safely into His barn (heaven). Often the difficult circumstances in our life, gives us the opportunity to gain the greatest spiritual development and growth.

Although not always so, instruments of threshing can include other people, situations in our life or circumstances that we are placed in. As an example, a hurting word or action from someone who crosses our path of life will test our ability to overcome our own normal reactions and instead forgive them and show love towards them. Afflictions and emotional pain in our lives usually diverts our attention from our busy self-absorbed lifestyles allowing us to slow our life down and reflect on how our life is being lived.

When threshing comes our way, our role is to turn towards God with a willing heart to allow Him to complete His work of threshing on each of us even though the process of separating from the world and letting go of living life just for ourselves is difficult and painful. The Lord tests people to find out what is in our hearts. The testing provides evidence not only to God but also to us of the state of our heart before God.

When we are tested, God always gives us a choice. What we decide determines how much further threshing is required to make us more like the people God wants us to be. Separation from the world is an ongoing process and after we commit our life to God, we must willingly yield to the work of the Holy Spirit to spiritually mature and live our daily life dedicated to God.

Although we want our lives to be blessed by God so that we do not have to be challenged physically, emotionally, financially or perhaps even in our faith, the reality is that when life is going smoothly people tend to feel that they do not need God, forget or ignore Him and often have little time and inclination to seek Him with all their heart. For some Christians, God can have a place in our usually busy and self-focused lifestyles but there is little if any spiritual growth. Given that all is going well, there is a tendency to be self-confident and self-focused and there is little or no commitment to seriously live daily in a way that pleases God.

When God was leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt He took them into the wilderness for 40 years, delaying their arrival, because they were unprepared to trust and obey Him. He told the nation that He took them into the wilderness to test them to see what was in their heart.

Deuteronomy 8:2 And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

God tested David, the man He described as a "man after His own heart". David was prophesied to be king over Israel but he had to undergo an extended period of threshing and testing before the time would come for him to become king.

David, though a good and faithful person, was pursued by King Saul who had an evil spirit that had been sent by God to torment him. Twice Saul threw a spear at David trying to kill him, he pursued David relentlessly while David hid and avoided him, maintaining his belief that he could not harm Saul because he was the man anointed as king by God. Eventually, David was driven to Israel's enemy the Philistines and lived with them. The Philistine king attested to David's good character by saying that he was like an angel from God, without any faults. When the time came for war between Israel and the Philistines, David offered to fight with the Philistines but the king's commanders did not trust him to fight against his own people. They sent David and his men back to their homes but when they returned they were devastated because an invading army had taken their wives and families. At that point David's men, overcome with grief, wanted to kill him but when every natural inclination prompted him to pursue the enemy that had taken his family and the families of his men, he displayed his good heart and passed another test by first seeking God's approval to pursue the enemy. God granted it and he recovered all that had been lost, including his two wives and children.

God had great plans for David but in order to succeed in all that He had for Him, he had to mature spiritually through a threshing process so that in due time he could be a good king over God's chosen people. God wanted David to be a person who would humbly trust and rely totally on Him rather than on himself.

Through all his difficult times of threshing, David proved that he was continually faithful to God and that he trusted, feared, loved and obeyed God. Time spent alone in the fields in his youth as a shepherd had resulted in strong spiritual character and a sound preparation for him to rule over the nation of Israel as their king. Now with further testing and threshing, his spiritual life matured so that he had one heart with God, only wanting to do what God wanted to do. As we have just seen, this was often at the expense of what was reasonable for him to do and expected of him to do by those around him. He rightly deserved to be called a man after God's heart. His only desire was to live in accordance with God's will. He was determined to allow God to take control of his life. He was willing to wait for God's timing and for God to fulfil His plan for his life. In God's time, Saul was killed and David became king of Israel and faithfully served God in this role.

There is a further lesson we need to learn from David's life. After David was made king of Israel, he enjoyed a prosperous life which included material wealth, comfort, wives and concubines, adoration from his subjects and repeated success over his enemies. This period of prosperity and comfort, which lasted about 17 years, resulted in him being more vulnerable to temptation, specifically, pride and lust. David was drawn into the sin of adultery and murder. Apparently unable to recognize his disobedience to God, David had to be convicted of it by the prophet, Nathan. Later pride stirred in his heart and he was motivated to number the people in Israel. As a result of this action he again displeased God.

Even though David repented of His sins and restored his relationship with God, the danger of his comfortable, self confident and prosperous life should be recognized by all believers. All the threshing and testing that David had gone through in the wilderness which he passed so successfully still could not prevent him from falling into sin during some of his time as king. In his comfort, contentment and attention to worldly things, David started to become distracted from God, less reliant on Him and backslid into sin. The impact that a comfortable life had on David compared to his relationship with God through times of adversity gives us an indication of how easy it is to draw away from God in our comfort and worldly distraction.

John the Baptist was appointed by God prior to his birth to be the person who would herald in the kingdom of God and prepare the way for Jesus Christ. His message was one of convicting people of their sin and telling them to repent. Jesus said that of all people who had lived until that day, John the Baptist was the greatest. John was special to God and God blessed him with His Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. John was the forerunner for Jesus and he prophesied of how Jesus would cleanse His threshing floor, separating out the wheat from the chaff.

Matthew 3vs12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Only God can perform the threshing process by the power of the Holy Spirit and only Christ will determine on the day of judgment the chaff and the wheat. John the Baptist said that at that time Jesus Christ will have His winnowing fork in His hand and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor. All people on the threshing floor who have gone through threshing by the Holy Spirit will be separated into the wheat or the

chaff. On that day all the spiritual work completed by the Holy Spirit (the wheat) will join Christ while the carnal (the chaff) will be burned in unquenchable fire (hell). People who are unbelievers and those who claim a Christian belief but are spiritually dead to God, will be chaff and be taken away to be lost forever in the unquenchable fire.

Malachi 4vs1 " For behold, the day is coming, burning like an furnace, and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze. " says the Lord of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." ²⁰

God only sees two types of people on this earth, those who are reconciled to Him and separated from the world and those who are not. He also sees within the lives of believers that portion of our life that is spiritual and that which is carnal. The Holy Spirit works upon the lives of all individuals to enable us to recognize our spiritual condition and make decisions to ensure that our life is seen by God as being increasingly wheat but we choose what work we allow Him to do.

The site chosen to build the first temple was Mount Moriah where Abraham had once taken his own son to sacrifice to God. Just prior to being the temple site, it was the threshing floor of Ornan (2Chronicles 3v1). The temple was the place of sacrifice, service, teaching, prayer, purification, holiness and worship. It was most importantly the place where God's presence was. Under the New Covenant, the body of a believer becomes the temple of God. The rightful place for the life of any person is always upon the spiritual threshing floor where God can work to spiritually draw us to Himself and then prepare, purify and perfect each one of us so that we are able to please Him during our life here on earth and so that we are spiritually prepared for eternity.

18. Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1995. Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Rev. ed. of: Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary.; Includes index. T. Nelson: Nashville.

19. Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1995. Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Rev. ed. of: Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary.; Includes index. T. Nelson: Nashville.

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