

[saraph]

:: 1 chronicles 4.21-23 ::

Last week we took a look at Jabez and this concept of the one-verse-wonder in the Bible. Throughout God's word we find these characters who appear for just a verse or two and then are never mentioned again, yet, their lives and circumstances give us a lot to learn and apply.

This morning we're back in 1 Chronicles chapter 4 where we discover *another* one-verse-wonder, a gentleman by the name of Saraph.

I find this to be a very inspiring portion of Scripture as we take a look at these verses and try to determine what the Lord might teach us from them.

1 Chronicles 4.21-23 - The sons of Shelah the son of Judah were Er the father of Lecah, Laadah the father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of the linen workers of the house of Ashbea; also Jokim, the men of Chozeba, and Joash; Saraph, who ruled in Moab, and Jashubi-Lehem. Now the records are ancient. These were the potters and those who dwell at Netaim and Gederah; there they dwelt with the king for his work.

Lot of names in there, but we want to focus on Saraph, who ruled in Moab. His name, in Hebrew, means *burning*¹ or, *to shine*. He was a descendant of Judah and at some point he ruled in Moab. When he ruled there is very important to our understanding, because commentators are split on what we should think about this character Saraph. The language and record gives us two options:

The first option is that Saraph was a faithful servant of God and Israel. This is the interpretation that I, personally ascribe to. He would have been sent to Moab during the time of David, when that region was conquered, to govern and enforce the rule of the king.

Moab, of course, was the area where the wicked Moabites lived, people who were enemies of God and Israel, but subjected by David during his reign.

2 Samuel 8.2 - Then [David] defeated Moab. Forcing them down to the ground, he measured them off with a line. With two lines he measured off those to be put to death, and with one full line those to be kept alive. So the Moabites became David's servants, and brought tribute.

For Saraph to serve there would have been difficult, dangerous and probably pretty discouraging. It was on the other side of the Dead Sea, separated from Jerusalem and the territories of Judah. It would have been a sacrifice to go there at behest of the king to do his work.

But Saraph did go. And he had dominion there. He mastered the task. He accomplished what he was called to do.

Each of us have a calling on our lives.

¹ Lockyer *All The Men Of The Bible* pg 294

Ephesians 4.1 - I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

We discover our calling by spending time with the Lord and opening up our lives to be available to him.

Once we know what that calling is, our duty is to do it. Very simple. God has formed us and fashioned a life for us to live that we might become glorious vessels through which He accomplishes His will, but our pliability, our *usability* is up to us. And, sadly, we often reject God's calling in favor of some other pursuit or desire, which will eventually leave us unusable, unsatisfied and without purpose in our lives on the earth.

Saraph answered the call, took his difficult post and accomplished what the king asked him to do.

Now, depending on your translation, you may get a little more information about this character.

Let's take a look at verses 22 and 23 in the Amplified Version:

1 Chronicles 4.22-23 - And Jokim, the men of Cozeba, Joash, and Saraph, who ruled in Moab, and returned to [Bethlehem]. These are ancient matters. These were the potters and those who dwelt among plantations and hedges at Netaim and Gederah; there they dwelt with the king for his work.

Very interesting. So first, Saraph was willing to take a difficult position of leadership in Moab, but here we see that at some point he returned to Bethlehem with members of his family to become a potter in the plantations and hedges of the king.

Here we see that Saraph embodies how a servant of the Lord is supposed to behave. Throughout this chapter we see the different trades of these men of Judah highlighted. Up in verse 14 it talks about a group of craftsmen, in our passage it mentions a group of linen-workers, and here we find Saraph as one of the potters in the king's garden.

He was a guy with skill and gifting, excellent in his work, but who also had a humble servant's heart. At some point the king taps his shoulder and sends him off to govern in Moab. Though difficult, it would've been a prestigious deployment. But then after some time, the king called him back. He says, "Great job. Now I need to you come back and work in the plants and the hedges. I need you to be a gardener." And Saraph returns to Bethlehem to serve David as a potter, working as a field laborer. This is an amazing range of duties.

And what we find is a man whose contentment and self-worth is centered around doing the king's work. A man who had no selfish ambition, but was focused wholly on accomplishing that which the king wanted him to do, who was flexible and available and useable to do a variety of tasks in the kingdom.

Selfish ambition is the enemy of ministry. On Sunday we learned from the Lord's prayer about God's power and His glory. How the Lord's power is present in our lives when we're seeking His glory and vice-versa.

In our culture we are rights oriented and we're upward-mobility oriented. Nothing wrong with that from a cultural standpoint, but we have to jettison those ideas from our faith. The ideas that **my rights** are the most important thing and **my glory** is the focus of my life are contrary to the truths of the Bible.

Instead, may we be men who serve God like Saraph did. Who shine for Him and burn brightly as He refines us and strips away those impurities and imperfections from our hearts. He was the shining servant who shows us what it is to have a life submitted to the King.

There is another interpretation held by some good Bible commentators on this man. Matthew Henry sums it up well in his notes on these verses.

He says:

...another family had had dominion in Moab, but were now in servitude in Babylon, v. 22, 23. (1.) It was found among the ancient things that they had the dominion in Moab. Probably in David's time, when that country was conquered, they transplanted themselves [there], and were put in places of power there, which they held for several generations; but this was a great while ago, time out of mind. (2.) Their posterity were now potters and gardeners, as is supposed in Babylon, where they dwelt with the king for his work, got a good livelihood by their industry, and therefore cared not for returning with their brethren to their own land, after the years of captivity had expired. Those that now have dominion know not what their posterity may be reduced to, nor what mean employments they may be glad to take up with. But those were unworthy the name of Israelites that would dwell among plants and hedges rather than be at the pains to return to Canaan.

Henry and a few others feel that Saraph had been deployed to Moab under David's reign, but eventually his family had abandoned the people of Israel in favor of a life with the Babylonian empire.

While I find the weight of evidence indicates that Saraph was a hero and **not** a villain, this interpretation from Henry gives us a contrast by which we can test our own lives.

Each of us has a calling. Each of us has skill and gifting from the Lord. Each of us live in a lost and sinful place as representatives of the King. From this point we can take 1 of 2 routes in our lives. We can be a Saraph in the positive sense of submission and contentment, or we can be a Sarpah in the Matthew Henry sense of lust for worldly pleasures.

The question is this: what sort of service are we rendering to Jesus Christ? What sort of Saraph are we?

Are we the Saraph who is humble and available, a man who will go anywhere to do any task the Lord might ask of us?

Or are we the Saraph who has become infatuated with the trivial richness of Babylon?

Are we waiting for the call to return home to Bethlehem, or are we more interested in staying out in the world while others draw closer to God?

These are questions we should ask of ourselves. These are important heart issues that will determine incredible things in our lives.

As I read this text, I find Saraph to be a hero. A Godly servant. He dedicated his life to service of the king. No matter what or where the job was, he was already determined to do it and then he followed through with excellence and faithfulness.

Let's determine to serve the Lord today, to focus on His glory, and find contentment in the life He has prepared for each of us to live.