

# **The Torch**

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# **Isaiah 43:19**

**“Behold, I am doing a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you  
not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the  
wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.”**

**It’s such a privilege to write the introduction to this latest edition of The Torch, our very longstanding publication that has been reaching its readers every year since 1931, even before the existence of Torch Trust as an organisation! Having recently stepped in to the role of Acting Chief Executive Officer here at Torch Trust in the UK, I am very excited to see God’s work carried out through all that we do, blessing lives and supporting the faith of Christians all around the world. Who**

**knows what new adventures and encounters lie ahead for us as we go about our work? Only the Lord. One thing is sure: I look forward to making sure that The Torch continues to encourage and inform you throughout the year.**

**In this edition of The Torch, we're thinking about change and growth, and God's sovereignty and goodness throughout such times. In fact, we are continually growing and changing as people, aren't we? No period of life is static. God is always shaping the clay of our lives on the potter's wheel, refining us and honing us.**

**So often, we don't see changes in our life from God's perspective. Whether big or small, we often feel discomfort or fear at the prospect of change. Fear: it's such a common reaction, that in the Bible God exhorts us 119 times not to be afraid. Sometimes, where God brings**

**a new thing springing forth, the unfamiliarity of what is happening can make us feel “this can’t be of the Lord!” and we miss a chance to trust his work in our lives. We lean on our own understanding, but this is contrary to the advice of Proverbs 3:5–6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and he will make your paths straight.”**

**We can trust in the Lord in this way because whilst it’s true that we are always growing and refining in our faith and character, the God we worship is an unchangeable refuge for us. The psalmist says in Psalm 102 that:**

**“In the beginning, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all**

**wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them, and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”**

**We serve a mighty God who in all things, works for the good of those who love Him. Wherever you are reading this, it’s my prayer for you that you will be uplifted and encouraged to embrace all that God is doing in your life today, even when it’s hard to understand what His purposes are.**

**Julia Hyde, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Torch Trust**

## **Changing and Growing**

**By Jenny Edwards**

**This article is taken from the Summer edition of Vital Link, the newsletter**

**from UK disability charity Through The Roof.**

**The weather has been so beautiful these last few days that I have been able to sit outside on my balcony for my breakfast, enjoying the bird song and watching the wildlife in the woodland I overlook. Amongst the early morning visitors were many butterflies, which reminded me of the amazing stages in its life before acquiring those lovely colours and the ability to fly. Starting with an egg, it becomes a caterpillar, then changes again to a chrysalis before emerging as a beautiful butterfly. How like our Christian lives as we grow in Christ, from our birth into the trust and faith and belief in the Saviour to the desire to explore further the life we have been born into. Like the caterpillar we wander around, but have many times of growth through our lives. The chrysalis stage, when we are waiting on**

**God to work in us and through us, until finally we form the butterfly that He wants us to be. I have a card on my desk that says “What the caterpillar calls THE END, the Master calls BUTTERFLY”. God is at work in us and through us every moment of our lives in order to see us become a beautiful butterfly in His Kingdom. Trust in your God to bring you to a place where you know you have the potential to spread your wings and fly for Him, and watch out for those butterflies, all different colours and shapes but all formed perfectly how God wants them to be.**

## **God is Directing Your Steps**

**This article is taken from UCB’s Word For Today**

**“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord”**

**Psalm 37:23**

**Elijah’s destiny was to stand on Mount Carmel, call down fire from heaven, and deliver Israel from idolatry. But he could only get there one step at a time. That’s how God works. First God sent him to a brook at Cherith (which means ‘covenant’). At some point in your spiritual journey you must discover that God is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. He miraculously dried up the Jordan River, made an axe-head float, and caused fish to swim into an empty net – proving that when He makes a promise He keeps it. When God sent Elijah to Cherith, He told him, ‘I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there’ (1 Kings 17:4 KJV). Had Elijah gone elsewhere, God wouldn’t have met his needs. Why? Because a covenant is**

**two-sided; when you do your part God does His. Next God sent Elijah to Zarephath, saying, ‘I have commanded a widow . . . to sustain thee’ (v. 9 KJV). Think about it: God used a flesh-eating bird and a penniless widow to feed Elijah, so stop trying to second-guess Him! The Bible says, ‘The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.’ So here’s the question: if you truly believe that Scripture, why are you complaining, worrying, and trying to figure everything out instead of trusting Him? ‘Zarephath’ means ‘a crucible’, a place where metal is refined. If you’re going through a fiery trial today, rejoice – God is separating the gold from the impurities in your character. When you’ve passed the test at Cherith and Zarephath, you’ll be ready for the blessing of Mount Carmel!**

# **Hearts Aflame**

**By Stella Heath**

**Stella Heath, who co-founded Torch Trust and edited this magazine for many years, wrote many articles and books. A manuscript left unfinished at her death in 2009 has now been completed by her companion of many years, Eileen Cole. The theme – opening up the Old Testament to today’s readers – is a vital one. Hearts Aflame has been published by Torch and is available in standard print, Braille, large print and audio. In this extract, Stella looks at the life of Gideon.**

## **Israel and Shiloh**

**Eventually, when the people settled down, the priests and Levites, who were**

**a very special group of people who had been chosen by God to look after the Tabernacle, set it up at a place called Shiloh (Joshua 18:1).**

**Shiloh was a place of glory and joy; the Glory of God shone over the Tabernacle because the Ark of the Covenant was there inside the Holy of Holies. Three times a year the Israelites came to worship God. They brought their offerings to the Lord, and he forgave their sins. The Lord was pleased that the people were serving and obeying hm.**

**These were the golden years at Shiloh.**

**Time passed and God gave his people victory over all their enemies. Joshua died at the age of 110 and Caleb when he was ten years older. The Lord chose men to lead or judge his people – which is why the next book in the Bible is called “Judges”.**

**It is interesting to try to understand the situation in the land of Canaan. Many of the Israelites wanted to follow God, and went to Shiloh to worship him. However, they needed to work through the problems caused by the idol worshippers surrounding them. Sadly, some of the people had forgotten the Lord altogether.**

## **Gideon's Dilemma**

**The nations around were always trying to invade the Israelites, who got tired of fighting. For seven years the Midianites from Moab had been attacking the country repeatedly. Many of the Israelites were so terrified that they had gone to live in caves and dens in the mountains. The Midianites were destroying their crops and livestock, and the Israelites were facing**

starvation. “Why has this happened? Whatever can we do? Has God forgotten us?” was the piteous cry of the few people who still loved and obeyed God.

But God had heard their cry for help, and he had the answer. At first, he called a prophet to give them a word from God. “I am the Lord your God,” was the message the prophet recited. “I saved you from the Egyptians and gave you this land. I told you not to worship their gods, but you have not obeyed me.” This was awesome! God had not forgotten his people – they had forgotten him! (Judges 6:1–10).

Amongst the Israelites, there was a man called Gideon, who was desperately longing to know more about God. The Angel of the Lord came and sat under an oak tree near where Gideon and his father had sought shelter. Gideon was crouching in the winepress, trying to

**grind corn into grain, without being seen by the Midianites.**

**“The Lord is with you, you mighty man of fearless courage!” said the Angel.**

**“Oh, sir, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wondrous works which we are told he did when he brought us out of Egypt? The Lord has forsaken us now!” cried Gideon.**

**“You are to go and save Israel!” said the Angel**

**“But I am the poorest, and the least of my people, how can I deliver Israel?” was the reply.**

**“I will be with you, and give you the victory,” said the Lord.**

**Gideon could not believe his ears! Could he be dreaming? “If you really are speaking to me, accept my offering,” he begged. He hurried away to prepare it.**

**“Now,” said the Angel when he got back with a basket of food, “take the meat and bread and lay them on this rock, and pour the broth over them.”**

**Gideon obeyed, and the Angel touched the food with his staff. Fire flamed up from the rock, and burnt it. Suddenly Gideon realised he had been talking to God. He was terrified – whatever would happen to him? “Alas, Lord, God, now I have seen you face to face,” cried Gideon.**

**“Do not be afraid, for you shall not die,” said the Lord. So Gideon worshipped God, right there in the open.**

**That night God challenged Gideon “Take your father’s bull, pull down the altar of Baal, build a true altar, and offer the bull as a burnt sacrifice to me.”**

**Gideon was dismayed – what would his neighbours do if they saw him attack the altar of their god? He waited until**

**night and then took ten of his servants and hewed down the Baal symbols in the dark – he was too afraid to do it by day!**

**It was just as he feared – the people were furious and wanted to kill him. But his father stood up for Gideon. “If Baal is a true god, he can deal with anyone who destroys his altar!” he said. The people agreed that this made sense, and waited for something terrible to happen to Gideon. But all was well; the Lord protected his servant who had risked everything to obey Him (Judges 6:11–31).**

## **The Battle**

**The Midianites, Amalekites and other enemies united into a huge army to fight against the Israelites. But the Spirit of God filled Gideon with his**

power, and Gideon called the people to fight.

But he was still worried; he needed to be sure he was doing right. He asked God for a sign, and carried a fleece of wool outside and laid it on the ground. Next morning dew lay heavily on the fleece but the ground was dry. However, Gideon was still afraid; had God really given a sign, or had someone happened to spill water onto the fleece? So the very next night Gideon prayed to God for another sign. This time the fleece was dry, and the ground was wet. There was no way that could have happened unless God had worked a miracle! (Judges 6:33–40).

# **The Challenge**

**Gideon, and the Israeli army assembled to fight the huge enemy, but many of the Israelites were afraid.**

**The Lord called to Gideon, “There are too many people in your camp, for if I gave them the victory, they would think it was their own doing. Tell them that any one who is afraid can go home.”**

**22,000 of the men of Israel went away at once. Gideon was horrified to have only 10,000 left, but the Lord said, “The men are still too many, so bring them down to the river, and I will test them for you there.”**

**Gideon watched as the thirsty men enjoyed a drink. God told him that those who knelt down to drink the water could go back home. Only 300 men stood by the river and drank from their cupped**

hands. They were the ones God had chosen for the fight.

That night, Gideon secretly took his servant with him to survey the enemy. They overheard some of the Midianite soldiers saying that they were afraid of Gideon. When Gideon heard this, he was reassured; God really was going to give the victory.

Next night Gideon divided the 300 men into three companies, giving them trumpets and empty jars with torches hidden inside them. Silently they crept into position and stood bravely on every side of the Midianite camp. When Gideon gave the signal, they blew the trumpets, and shattered the jars completely, so that the torches shone brightly in the dark. They yelled at the top of their voices, “The sword for the Lord and Gideon”.

**The enemy soldiers were woken by the crash; everywhere they looked, they saw bright lights! They thought they were surrounded by a mighty army and fled in their thousands, fighting each other as they ran (Judges 7:1–22).**

## **Peace at Last!**

**The Israelites wanted to crown Gideon king, but he refused. “No, God is your king,” he said. For many years Gideon ruled Israel wisely, but in old age he became proud and wanted to make his hometown, Ophrah, the most important place in Israel. So he arranged for the people to come there to worship. This was wrong, as God had chosen Shiloh. Gideon also had a golden copy made of one of the High Priest’s very special holy clothes, and the people worshipped this in Ophrah (Judges 8:22–27).**

**The story of Gideon was over. In the following years, some of the population stopped believing in God, worshipped idols and did many evil things.**

**There were others who longed for the truth, and continued to worship God. They remembered that the Lord had shown many aspects of power, light and joy when he delivered his people from the Egyptians and their other enemies.**

**In our day, we see darkness and despair filling hearts and minds, for the world is fast racing to death and destruction. It makes us long to share in the brightness and glory of our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is all-powerful, all-loving and all-sufficient, ready to bless us with his love and favour. Praise him, for he is Lord of all!**

# **God's Special People: Caleb**

**By Michael Stafford**

**Caleb was a pattern of what a man of God should be: consistent in youth, middle-age and old age:**

## **He was ardent in youth**

**We first encounter Caleb, as a young man, in Numbers 13 where Moses had sent 12 men to spy out the land of Canaan and report back to him. Caleb was the representative from the tribe of Judah. The account of this story is a sad one: the spies discovered a wonderful, fruitful land which would make a great home for God's people but there were intimidating enemies who were so strong and fearsome that 10 of the spies**

felt they could never be overcome. Caleb alone spoke out, claiming that, with God's enabling, they could defeat the enemy and occupy the land. However, the people would not listen. They were like a crowd of frightened sheep and even tried to stone Caleb. There have been many 'lone voices' through the years, both in Christianity and politics. Christian examples would be William Carey, the father of the missionary movement who was opposed in his missionary plans by his own church, and William Wilberforce who lobbied parliament for many years to end slave trading.

**The Lord said to Moses:**

**. . . not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested**

**me ten times – not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No-one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. (Numbers 14:22–24)**

**Joshua shared Caleb’s optimism but this was not appreciated by the Israelites who wanted to go back to Egypt, but God intervened and declared His anger because of the lack of faith of His people. As a punishment the Israelites were to suffer 40 long years of wandering in the desert until all that generation had died. Only Joshua and Caleb survived to enter the land with the next generation.**

# **He was steadfast in middle age**

**As a young man he was noted for courage, faith and determination. The enthusiasm of youth often wanes later in life, but this did not happen with Caleb who endured the next 40 years of wandering and suffering with the Israelites yet clung to the promises of God.**

**The hardest thing in the Christian life is not the challenges and exciting things, but the daily slog and apparent lack of God at work even though we pray. Unless, like Caleb, we cling to God's promises, we will go downhill in our Christian life. Jesus said 'Look up for your redemption draws near', and Caleb kept in mind the future possession of the land God was giving them. He was a man with vision, and we also need to**

**keep in view the glorious future which God has promised us.**

## **He was undaunted in old age**

**The next significant mention of Caleb is found in the book of Joshua when he was 85 years old! After the Israelites had entered the land, Joshua apportioned different areas among the tribes, and within those areas individual people were given pieces of land. Thus we find Caleb in chapter 14 petitioning Joshua for land in Hebron:**

**. . . Here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself**

**heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.  
(Joshua 14:10–12)**

**Caleb did not have Hebron handed to him on a plate! He had to fight for it. It was the very place where the giants were – and it was a mountain! He succeeded in possessing this place because he ‘wholly followed the Lord’. There were no half-measures or compromises. To wholly follow is not to hold anything back from God, and to stand out as a man or woman of God.**

**We find the name Caleb mentioned again in the book of Judges, as his nephew Othniel became one of the judges who ruled Israel for 40 years. After that there is no more mention of him, but his spiritual legacy lives on. God commended him especially for his wholeheartedness along with Joshua,**

**and in contrast to the wavering and fearfulness of the other Israelites. God's commendation of Caleb shows how important to God is faith. And Caleb's faith was not confined to a particular era of his life. He was consistent right through to old age.**

**God does not change, and is still insistent upon faith and wholeheartedness in His children. This is not surprising, when we consider what a compliment it is to a person to have trust placed in them. There can in fact be no greater compliment as it proclaims that the person trusted is one who is faithful and reliable and someone who we can safely depend on. Do you trust God like that? Do you depend utterly on Him? He is able to save; He is able to keep. Paul could say: 'I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.'**

**(2 Timothy 1:12). Let us also seek to have this knowledge, so that we, like Caleb, can face the challenges of everyday life, with peace in our hearts due to the confidence we have in a God who is able.**

## **Let The Scriptures Speak**

### **Psalm 143**

**Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy;  
In your faithfulness and righteousness, come to my relief.**

**Do not bring your servant into judgement,  
for no one living is righteous before you.**

**The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground;**

**He makes me dwell in the  
darkness like those long dead.  
So my spirit grows faint within  
me; my heart within me is  
dismayed.**

**I remember the days of long  
ago; I meditate on all your  
works**

**And consider what your hands  
have done.**

**I spread out my hands to you;  
I thirst for you like a parched  
land.**

**Answer me quickly, Lord; my  
spirit fails.**

**Do not hide your face from me  
or I will be like those who go  
down to the pit.**

**Let the morning bring me word  
of your unfailing love,  
for I have put my trust in you.  
Show me the way I should go,  
for to you I entrust my life.**

**Rescue me from my enemies,  
Lord, for I hide myself in you.  
Teach me to do your will, for  
you are my God;  
may your good Spirit lead me  
on level ground.**

**For your name's sake, Lord,  
preserve my life;  
in your righteousness, bring  
me out of trouble.  
In your unfailing love, silence  
my enemies;  
destroy all my foes, for I am  
your servant.**

# **A Prayer For Serenity**

**“God grant me the serenity to  
accept the things I cannot  
change,  
Courage to change the things  
I can,  
And the wisdom to know the  
difference.”**

**Rienhold Niebuhr**

