

JUDGES SESSION #8

GIDEON

As we move on to the next Judge – that rather famous character, Gideon – let’s look first at the **background** of his story.

Judg 6:1-10

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, ² 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 strongholds which *are* in the mountains. ³ So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

⁷ And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, ⁸ that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; ⁹ and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ Also I said to you, "I *am* the Lord your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice."

- the Midianites (from the desert area to the SE) have a **new military weapon**: **camels**
 - these swift animals gave them long-range scope...note the extent of their raids: into Manasseh, but also Zebulun, Naphtali, Asher and Gaza
 - these were *seasonal* invasions; the Midianites did not actually settle in the land
 - but the result of these repeated invasions was to put the people of Israel into great distress (again)
- you will have noticed that their basic situation is very similar to other earlier times of trouble; but what is *different* this time in terms of the cycle they go through?
 - instead of sending a deliverer/judge, God first sent a **prophet** – **why did He do that?**
 - well, they cried to God, but they had still not dealt with their sin;
 - so God reminds them of the basic problem
- back in chapter 2 verses 1 & 2 the Angel of the Lord had delivered virtually the same identical message; now years later, God is still saying, “**But you have not obeyed My voice.**”
- sometimes in our distresses God may not ‘deliver’ us immediately because He has His own good reasons for handling our situation differently than we might wish
 - at times He may use such situations to remind us of some basic area in our lives where we have gone astray or failed to obey Him: “**But you have not obeyed My voice.**”
- having reminded them, through the prophet, of the basic reason for their oppression, God in His gracious love then proceeds to give them another judge in the line of deliverers

A. GIDEON'S CALL

Let's begin with Gideon's Call and pick up the story again with verses 11 through 16:

¹¹ Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which *was* in Ophrah, which *belonged* to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites. ¹² And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!"

¹³ Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, * if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where *are* all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

¹⁴ Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

¹⁵ So he said to Him, "O my Lord, * how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father's house."

¹⁶ And the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

- notice the **description** of Gideon
 - here is a man marked by fear, discouragement & skepticism
 - his immediate fear is that of being discovered by the Midianites as he threshes out his grain; but he must have had a very small harvest since he was threshing it in the confines of a winepress
- I'm reminded of the story of a man who took his problem to a psychiatrist: "Doctor you must help me... I feel worthless...my friends tell me I have a terrible inferiority complex. Can you help me?" Psychiatrist gave him some tests. After his evaluation a week later, the doctor told him, "I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is: we have proved you do **not** have a complex. The bad news is, you *are* inferior."
- well, Gideon may not have been inferior, but he certainly had a complex
- in contrast, notice how **God addresses** him in vs. 12
 - He calls him a "mighty man of valor/warrior" ...**Why?**
 - God was going to transform Gideon from a weak & fearful person into a hero of faith
 - God saw Gideon's **potential** - his *possibilities* in the providence of God
 - other notable Bible characters like Abraham and Peter had unpromising beginnings too, but God turned them into powerful people of faith
- notice that Gideon's possibilities were not connected primarily to his personality or character or skills; they were directly linked to **God's promise**: "The Lord is with you"
- it's a promise God repeats again in verse 16, emphasizing the importance of this phrase

(1) here in Gideon's early story we have **God's answer to the problem of**

DISCOURAGEMENT – it's a two-part answer:

- first, the promise of His **commission** (vs. 14 – "Go...and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites")

- ...and the promise of **companionship** (vs. 16 – “Surely I will be with you”)
- these **same 2 promises** had provided the basis for courage for **Joshua**:
Josh 1:9
Have I not commanded you? [God’s commission] Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God *is* with you wherever you go.” [God’s companionship]
 - ...that great missionary Hudson Taylor said: "All of God's *great* men have been *weak* men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them; they counted on His faithfulness."
 - Gideon’s “might” (“Go in this your might...”) was the fact that God was **sending** him & would go **with him**
 - and **our** ‘might’ – our ability to do anything for God – is based on exactly the same great two promises, as Jesus expressed them in the **Great Commission**:
“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19-20)

(2) there is a 2nd problem here in Gideon’s story: the problem of **INADEQUACY**

- God’s answer to this problem, in Gideon’s case and in ours is:
God’s adequacy!
- the Apostle Paul also knew this because Jesus had told him – as Paul recorded in 2 Cor. 12:9 –
“My strength [the *Lord’s* strength] is made perfect in weakness [*our* weakness]”
“Therefore [Paul goes on to say]...I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

...back to Gideon’s story again:

Judg 6:17-24

¹⁷ Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. ¹⁸ Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set *it* before You."

And He said, "I will wait until you come back."

¹⁹ So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought *them* out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented *them*. ²⁰ The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay *them* on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so.

²¹ Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that *was* in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

²² Now Gideon perceived that He *was* the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face."

²³ Then the Lord said to him, "Peace *be* with you; do not fear, you shall not die."

²⁴ So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-*Is*-Peace.

[Jehovah Shalom]

- Gideon tested the 'angel' – "if I have found favor... **then** show me a sign..."
 - he then prepared an offering of meat and bread to the Lord
 - ...the Hebrew word used in vs. 18 indicates a "freewill offering"; or it could also refer to a tribute given to a king
- do you see anything significant about this meal offering which Gideon prepared?
 - this was not a quick trip to MacDonaldis!
 - this was a feast in a time of famine; this meal **cost** something!
 - the previous graphic doesn't do it justice...
 - the flour alone weighed about 18 kilos [40 lbs]!
 - plus a whole goat! – I lived in Africa for 10 years and know that even in our day, preparing a goat to eat means that the meal is a special one indeed, usually because of an honored guest
- the Lord accepted the meal as a sacrifice, confirming to Gideon that he had met the LORD (another appearance in the OT of the 2nd Person of the Trinity)
- but this confirmation only served to make Gideon **fearful** again, remembering God's word to Moses in Exod. 33:20 – "no man shall see Me, and live"
- however, the Lord extends His mercy and grants Gideon "peace"
 - so he builds an altar there with the appropriate name: Jehovah-*shalom*
- so far, **Gideon's preparation** has been marked by a wonderful **transformation** ...accomplished by the presence of God in his life, his commissioning *by* God and assurance *from* God

B. GIDEON'S INITIAL OBEDIENCE

- this brings us to Gideon's initial obedience, recorded in...

Judg 6:25-32

²⁵ Now it came to pass the same night that the Lord said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image* that *is* beside it; ²⁶ and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down." ²⁷ So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Lord had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do *it* by day, he did *it* by night.

²⁸ And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that *was* beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar *which had been* built. ²⁹ So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing." ³⁰ Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that *was* beside it."

³¹ But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If

he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!" ³²
Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal,* saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."

- the first step Gideon takes in obedience is to destroy the pagan altar which had been erected by his father – no doubt a tough thing to do!
 - but **private commitment must produce public discipleship**
 - compared to the later battle, this was a small thing; but I'm sure it must have seemed big to Gideon at the time
 - ...he reminds us that obedience in **small** ways can qualify us for **larger** ministries

- James Jordan suggests **some implications or lessons** for us from this incident:
 - a) Baal must go before Midian can go
 - in our lives, we must destroy any idols in our hearts before we will be able to defeat sins & problems that enslave us
 - b) God's altar cannot be built until Baal's altar is destroyed
 - c) the place we must start in following God is in our own backyard

- what were the **results** of this obedience? – well, there were at least three:
 - a) anger of townspeople (vss. 28-30 – “Who has done this thing?”)
 - b) the transformation of Gideon's father, Joash (in vs.31 he defends Gideon's actions)
 - the man Gideon had feared most had now become his greatest advocate!
 - c) Gideon's reputation
 - his name is changed from Gideon (“feller” or “hewer” of wood) to Jerubbaal (“let Baal plead/strive” – if Baal is so great, let him defend himself & his altar!)
 - his new name would serve as a **reminder** to Gideon & to Israel in future engagements with the enemy that Baal was an empty threat – he was not a god at all, absolutely nothing in comparison with Jehovah!

- there are at least three **reasons** for the **radical change** we witness in Gideon:
 - 1) he had firsthand **contact** with the 2nd Person of the Trinity
 - 2) he made a decisive, public **commitment** to God by an act of obedience
 - 3) he was now under the **control** of the Holy Spirit (6:34 tells us “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon”)
 - ...literally, “the Spirit of the LORD *clothed* Gideon” – as Sidlow Baxter said, “Gideon's personality became, so to speak, a garment in which God moved among men.”

- if you're looking for positive personal change, you can't find a better list to follow than this one!