

## JUDGES SESSION #9

### C. GIDEON'S GUIDANCE

- now let's examine one of the parts of Gideon's story that has made him famous for centuries: Judg 6:36-40

<sup>36</sup> So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said — <sup>37</sup> look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is* dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said." <sup>38</sup> And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. <sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew." <sup>40</sup> And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

- a missionary to Africa, Marti Ensign, once brought some African pastors to the United States for a big meeting. During their free time, these Africans wanted to go shopping. Even though they were in a small town, Marti knew there was a chance someone might have difficulty or get lost. So she gave them her phone number for such an emergency. In less than an hour the phone rang and the African said, "I am lost."
- Marti said, "Lay the phone down, go to the street corner, find out the names of the two streets at the corner, come back and tell me, and I will come and get you."
- In a few minutes he returned to the phone and reported, "I am at the corner of 'Walk' and 'Don't Walk.'"
- sometimes as we seek to know how God is leading us, we feel that we are at the same corner: should we 'walk' or 'don't walk'?
  
- Gideon's famous "fleece-setting" experience has been used by multitudes of people ever since as the supposed biblical basis for discovering God's will
- 'fleece-setting' in our day normally refers to the practice of asking God for 'a sign' through **circumstances**, that will indicate which decision we should make
  - eg. "God, if you want me to work with Company A instead of Company B then make someone phone me today and mention Company A by name."
  - or... "God, if it is your will that I marry such-and-such guy then the next time we meet let him invite me to lunch at Wendy's."
- but fleece-setting is **not** a way of discovering God's will through **circumstantial** signs, even in this original story
  - what Gideon requests God to do here involves a supernatural **miracle**, twice!
    - ...this is not the same thing as 'circumstances'
- secondly, fleece-setting is **not** a way of **discovering** God's will, even in Gideon's case
  - Gideon was not ignorant of God's will
    - God had *already* very clearly told Gideon what His will was
- well then, is fleece-setting an **evidence of faith**?
  - again, with reference to Gideon's story, fleece-setting is obviously an evidence of **doubt**, not of faith ...Gideon had fears and **doubts** about following god in such a risky adventure so

he was asking God, through the fleece experiments, to **confirm** His directions & reassure Gideon

- furthermore, did fleece-setting **solve Gideon's problem?**
  - clearly, fleece-setting does not really solve the problem
  - even though he received a clear, remarkable answer in the first round, this did not produce certainty for Gideon, so he asked for a 2nd round!
- finally, Gideon's request was **presumptuous**, a kind of 'dictating to God'; God graciously answered Gideon's request both times because of the difficult times in which Gideon lived and the challenge God had given him
- but Gideon is **not** an example for us to follow in this matter of 'putting out a fleece'

### C. **SELECTION FOR SERVICE**

Let's pick up the story again with "Selection for Service" as Gideon begins to form his army: Judg 7:1-3

Then Jerubbaal (that *is*, Gideon) and all the people who *were* with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

<sup>2</sup> And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people who *are* with you *are* too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' <sup>3</sup> Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever *is* fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.'"

And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.

- one of God's concerns in Gideon's story revolves around the issue of "**numbers/size**"
  - that's why the Midianites are referred to as "numerous as locusts"; they & their camels were "without number"

#### **Judges 7:12**

**"Now the Midianites and Amalekites...were...as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude."**

- that's why a key phrase in the preparation of Gideon's 'army' is "**too many**"
  - ...God keeps cutting down their numbers until the size of their army is ridiculous, especially against the innumerable Midianites – precisely so that it will be absolutely clear who deserves the glory in the victory: only God
- Israel has already proven themselves to be too vulnerable to pride
- I'm reminded of a story about Mohammed Ali who was famous for his proud boastings, when he was at the height of his boxing career – he had boarded a flight and the airline attendant, preparing passengers for take-off, asked him to buckle his seatbelt. He replied, "I'm superman. I don't need no seatbelt!" The attendant retorted, "If you were superman, Mr. Ali, you wouldn't need no airplane!"
- we ordinary human beings can become proud too; and the next easy step from proud self-confidence is **idolatry** – the idea that we don't really need God, that we are in control of our own lives
  - ...such thinking, even among God's people, ends up by refusing to let God be God in the practical aspects of our daily lives

- it is what has happened to Israel in these 'dark ages' of the times of the Judges
  - and God is constantly working to repair this problem
- there is a very important **principle** seen here: as God told Isaiah in Isa. 48:11, "I will not give my glory to another"
  - God helps the humble, but He resists the proud
- there's another **principle** here:
  - God is more concerned with **teaching us TRUST** than simply giving us a victory which may make us proud & self-reliant
    - there is an **application** at the **personal** level, one which we have referred to before:
      - you cannot be too SMALL for God to use, but you CAN be too BIG!
    - but there is also a **corporate application**...
      - in our church communities, we sometimes have a tendency to 'play the numbers game' indicating our belief in the importance of numbers, size, bigness
      - here's a **caution**: sometimes large numbers are not an infallible proof of God's blessing
        - ...as someone said, "God counts hearts, not heads."
  - **self-confidence** (positive thinking/pre-game pep talks, etc.) can be good; but usually this is not what is needed for spiritual victory
    - ...God wants to develop **God-confidence**, not *self-confidence*
  - to do so in Gideon's case, God tells him to administer **two tests** for those in his initial army:

1) **test of FEARLESSNESS** (vs. 3 – “whoever is fearful & afraid, let him depart...”)  
 - 22,000 failed this test!

- their fear indicated a lack of faith in God's **promise**

- and what was God's promise in this situation? It's found in...

Deut 20:1

"When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots *and* people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God *is* with you...

2) **test of FERVENCY**

Judg 7:4-6

<sup>4</sup>But the Lord said to Gideon, "The people *are* still *too* many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, *that* of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go." <sup>5</sup>So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." <sup>6</sup>And the number of those who lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water.

- there were 3 characteristics about this test:

a) it was a **SIMPLE** test

b) it was a **SECRET** test

- the outcome was not announced in advance

- c) it was a **SIGNIFICANT** test
- revealed an important difference between 300 men & all the others in terms of basic outlook – the 300 drank by dipping their hand into the water & bringing it up to their mouth, probably so that they could be alert to the enemy nearby; whereas the other 9,700 put their faces down to the water
- the testing of Gideon’s men highlights for us the importance of being conscientious, spiritually **alert**, and maintaining a sense of ultimate realities/values
- **God will TEST US** concerning commitment, priorities & readiness for larger service, perhaps in some similar way: simple thing, secret (at the time), but ultimately very significant
- perhaps I could share **my own experience** here, if you will allow me
- ...as a teenager I didn’t really live for the Lord until He brought me to a place of real commitment just before my final year in high school. When I began grade 12 I knew I had to identify with the other believers in my school as an outworking of this commitment; so I attended the year’s first meeting of the Youth for Christ club in our school – it turned out to be an election for the club officers & to my surprise I was elected president, and a young gal named Mary was elected vice-president
- looking back on that day from the perspective of many decades later, the decision of whether to attend that club meeting was a **simple** test from God;
  - it was also **secret** – I had no idea what the outcome would be;
  - and it was absolutely **significant**
    - I was introduced to the girl who would become my wife, and to the ministry in which I would serve for the next 30 years!
- when we look at Gideon’s men we see that those who failed this test *lost their opportunity* for special service – they weren’t included in his soon-to-be famous little army
  - But *what else* did they lose?
    - they **ALSO** lost what they already had, as verse 8 tells us (in the NIV version):  
The three hundred... took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.
- Jesus made the same point in Luke 19:26 when he said,  
“to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”
- the Message translation puts it this way: *“Risk your life [exercising faith & obedience] and get more than you ever dreamed of. Play it safe [don’t take any risks of faithful obedience] and end up holding the bag.”*
- once again God rings the bell on a common biblical truth: He *will* accomplish His divine purposes, but those who are **not** available or ready or willing to be used by Him will be the ones to suffer loss
- notice that Gideon in **retaining** all the jars, trumpets & torches indicates that he had developed his **plan** of attack by this time; God would give the victory, but it would also be a cooperative effort

What can we say in summary about the 300 who made ‘the cut’ into the final team?

- 1) they were **not fearful**
  - they believed God
- 2) they were more concerned with their **ultimate** task than their physical comforts
- 3) they were **alert & equipped** for further service