

Bible Stories

GIDEON

The Cowardly Deliverer

Judges 6:11-16

September 17, 2022

40 years have now passed and I bet you cannot guess what happened next....

- The Israelites did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.
- Yahweh gave them into the hands of the Midianites for 7 years
 - The hand of the Midianites prevailed over Israel ---- the Israelites made for themselves hiding places that *were* in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. ³ And whenever Israel sowed seed, the Midianites, Amalekites, and the people of *the* east would come up against them and destroy the produce of the land as far as Gaza; they left no produce in Israel, or sheep, ox, or donkey..... ⁶ Israel was very poor because of the presence of the Midianites,
- The Israelites cried to Yahweh – he sent them a no-named prophet:
 - **Judges 6:8-10** - “Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel: ‘I brought you up from Egypt; I brought you from the house of slavery. ⁹ I delivered you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors, and drove them out from *before you*; and I gave you their land. ¹⁰ And I said to you, ‘*I am* Yahweh your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you *are* living.’ But you have not listened to my voice.”

Over a period of 160 years, Yahweh had sent Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar and Deborah/Barak to deliver Israel from their self-chosen consequences. But each time, after the Deliverer died, the people just went right back to what they were doing before – fist raised rebellion – *“doing what was right in their own eyes.”*

What would you have done?

Well, God didn’t do what we would have done.... He sent them another deliverer ---- **GIDEON**.

Here is the Story of Gideon – Judges 6:1-8:35

Because of the tactics of the Midianites, Gideon was in a winepress threshing wheat, hoping to hide his activity from the enemy.

Yahweh, Himself, came and sat under the oak tree....

Yahweh: *Yahweh is with you, you Mighty Warrior!*

Gideon: *Excuse me, my lord. If Yahweh is with us, why then has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?’ But now Yahweh has forsaken us; he has given us into the palm of Midian.*

Can you sense his bitterness and frustration with God? Can you relate?

Yahweh: *Go in strength. You will deliver Israel from the palm of Midian. Did I not send you?*

Gideon: *Excuse me, my lord. How will I deliver Israel? Look, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.*

Yahweh: *But I will be with you, and you will defeat Midian as if they are one man.*

Gideon: *Please, if I have found favor in your eyes, show me a sign that you are speaking with me. Please, wait here until I come back.*

Yahweh: *I’ll wait.*

After preparing a young goat, some unleavened cakes and a pot of broth, Gideon went back to where Yahweh sat. As instructed, he put the meal down on a rock and pore the broth over it.

Yahweh touched the meat with his staff and fire consumed the offering.

Realizing in Who's presence he had been, Gideon built an altar and called it **"Yahweh is peace."**

That same night, Yahweh came again to Gideon and instructed him to pull down the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole that belonged to his father and build a proper altar to God. He was to take the wood from the Asherah pole and a bull from his father's herd and offer a burnt offering to God.

Before engaging the enemy Gideon must first declare war on Idolatry – because that's what the people really needed to be delivered from.

Gideon took 10 servants and did just as Yahweh had instructed – in the middle of the night. He was too afraid of his father's family and the other men of the city, to obey during the day.

When the men of the city saw what had been done, they went to Gideon's father, and demanded he give up his son – to be killed.

Jehoash {Gideon's father}: Are you going to fight Baal's battle? Does he need to be rescued? If he is a god, let him fight for himself.

Yahweh was not done with Gideon yet....

All the Midianites, Amalekites, and the people of *the* east gathered together in the valley of Jezreel.

The Spirit of Yahweh took possession of Gideon, and he called *the* Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet the Midianite army – with just 32,000 men.

Still unsure if this was really Yahweh calling him to do this crazy thing, Gideon asked for a sign:

- Wool fleece on the ground overnight. Fleece wet / grass dry – done

Still not convinced, Gideon asked Yahweh for another sign:

- Same wool fleece on the ground overnight. Fleece dry / grass wet – done

Only after this interaction, did Gideon find the faith he needed to do what Yahweh had asked him to do.

He gathered his 32,000 men and set off....

The combined army of the Midianites, Amalekites was like a great swarm of locusts. Even their camel herd was described as **"numerous as the sand on the seashore."**

Early in the morning, while the army of Israel was camped to the south of the Midianites, Yahweh appeared to Gideon:

Yahweh: *You have too many men. If I let you fight now, Israel will boast that they saved themselves by their own strength. So.... Tell the men that whomever is timid or afraid can go home.*

22,000 men went home, leaving just 10,000 Israelites to fight.

Yahweh: *You still have too many men. Bring them to the river and I will sort them there: Anyone who **laps at the water** as he runs – will go. Anyone who **kneels to get a drink** – will not go.*

- 300 lapped
- 9,700 knelt

Yahweh: *I will deliver you with the 300 men lapping up the water; I will give Midian into your hand. Let everyone else go home.*

Gideon was not at all sure that 300 soldiers could triumph over an army the size of **"a great swarm of locust."**

So, to encourage him, Yahweh told him to go on a little spy mission. Sneaking to an outpost, Gideon and a servant overheard the following conversation:

Soldier 1: *I had a dream. A round loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian. It came up to a tent, struck it, and the tent fell and turned upside down.*

Soldier 2: *This can only mean one thing – God has given Midian and the entire camp into Gideon’s hand.*

Gideon bowed in worship then returned to camp. He shouted, **“Get up, Yahweh has given the camp of Midian into your hand.”**

That night he divided his 300 men *into* 3 companies.

He gave every soldier a trumpet and lit torch – hidden inside an empty jar.

Gideon: *We are going to surround the camp. When I blow my trumpet, you blow your trumpets and shout, for Yahweh and for Gideon!*

And that’s just what happened. Gideon’s 300 men surrounded the camp - blew their trumpets - broke their jars – and shouted, **“For Yahweh and for Gideon.”**, sending the entire enemy camp into terror and chaos. In the confusion, the enemy soldiers began to kill each other. The remaining soldiers fled as far as Beth Shittah on the border by Tabbath and Israel pursued them - total victory.

“Yippee!” We cry **“What a great and uplifting story to the faithfulness and power of God.”** — Unfortunately, that is not the end of the story....

- **Judges 8:22-27** - The men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you and your sons, and your sons’ son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.”²³ But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; Yahweh will rule over you.”²⁴ And Gideon said to them, “Let me make a request of you, that each of you give to me an ornamental ring from his plunder.” (They *had* ornamental rings of gold, because they *were* Ishmaelites.)²⁵ They said, “We will gladly give *them to you*”....²⁶ The weight of just the ornamental rings *was* one 1,700 *shekels of* gold. This did not include the crescents, pendants or purple garments that had belonged to the kings of Midian, or the pendants that *were* on the necks of their camels.²⁷ Gideon made an ephod *out of* it, and he put it in his town in Ophrah, and all Israel prostituted *themselves* to it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

And the land rested for forty years in the days of Gideon.

Gideon had 70 sons because he had many wives.

Gideon died at a ripe old age and per usual, as soon as he died, Israel prostituted *themselves* and worshipped other gods. They did not remember Yahweh their God, who had delivered them from the hand of their enemies, nor did they show favor to the house of Gideon because of all the good he had done for Israel.

What do we do with this story?

To us, Gideon definitely **DID NOT** qualify as a **“deliverer”** type. He was a fearful and cowardly man. He was a defeatist who questioned God at every turn. He doesn’t appear to have had much faith – if any – and it took a little while to get him on board with Yahweh’s plan.

He did not occupy a prominent position in his clan or in Israel. He viewed himself as the least in his father’s house.

But that is not what God saw. God saw a man of courage and integrity, who was willing to follow and depend on the power the Almighty.

Taking God at His word, Gideon became a catalyst for change.

However, this story is also a cautionary tale. Satan is never idle and sometimes he finds that we are most vulnerable after a great victory. It is an easy slide from the top of the mountain into the valley.

Gideon declined the job of king, but he made the mistake of stepping outside of God’s will by assuming a priestly role {he was not of the house of Aaron or the tribe of Levi} that did not belong to him. Perhaps the blush of victory and the headiness of being recognized as a great leader made him over confident in himself – he forgot to Whom the real victory belonged – and in that moment Satan had him. The very thing he had been called to free Israel from, once again became their downfall, as they prostituted themselves before the golden Ephod he had made. Because of this one act, Israel and Gideon’s family would pay a high price.

“It is a solemn thought that the removal of one safeguard from the conscience, the failure to fulfill one good resolution, the formation of one wrong habit, may result not only in our own ruin, but in the ruin of those who have put confidence in us. Our only safety is to follow where the steps of the Master lead the way, to trust for protection implicitly to Him who says, “Follow me.” Our constant prayer should be. “Hold up my goings in thy path, O Lord, that my footsteps slip not” (ST July 28, 1881). {2BC 1004.6}