

GIDEON—A MIGHTY MAN OF VALOUR

Gideon was a great hero of the faith and the fifth of the judges of Israel. He is mentioned among the great in Hebrews 11. The story of Gideon is narrated in Judges 6-8.

In his time, Israel once again did evil in the sight of the LORD. They had previously enjoyed 40 years of peace and prosperity because of the victory God has provided through Deborah and Barak.

However, the Israelites had the tendency to forget God. To forget God is to invite trouble. At the time of the account of Gideon's story, Israel was in one of its many spiritual down-cycles. Having relapsed into apostasy and idolatry, they were brought under divine discipline and the domination of the Midianites for seven years.

In this story, the Midianites, Amalekites, and Mesopotamians are hounding them. These groups of people would attack Israel during the harvest season and steal the produce of the land. The power of these allies brought so much pressure and fear on the Jewish people that they *"hid themselves in dens, in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds."*

Times were tough, but God will use tough times to get our attention. The people *"cried for help from the Lord,"* (6:7). The Lord mercifully sent an unnamed prophet to reprove them for their disobedience and to bring them to repentance.

Gideon is the man God will mightily use to deliver Israel from the hands of the powerful Midianites. Let us consider 5 lessons from the narrative, which will help us to trust God more.

GOD CHOOSES THE WEAK THINGS TO SHAME THE STRONG

The book of Judges introduces Gideon in an unimpressive way. Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress, out of all the places. Normally, a person threshes wheat out in the open on a threshing

floor. Gideon was afraid that the Midianites will find his crops and so he hides himself.

There in that hidden place and frightened state , the Angel of the LORD appeared to him said to him , *"The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!"* Judges 6:12

We see from the get-go , that Gideon did not see himself as a mighty man nor a man of valor. The strong and fearless warriors do not hide as Gideon was doing. The men of valor are courageous enough to face the enemy straight on.

Gideon is quick to question the Angel of the Lord's statement : *The Lord is with you , you mighty man of valor."* He said, *"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"* (Judges 6:13).

Remember for a decade, Gideon and the nation did not feel the presence of God, because of their sin and the divine oppression they were enduring. From the response of Gideon, we can see how weak his faith has become during time. Instead of accepting the words of the Angel, he doubted and questioned it immediately.

The LORD replied to Gideon and said that *he will save Israel from the hands of the Midianites*. But Gideon fearfully and humbly reasoned: *"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"* (Judges 6:15).

The conversation between God and Gideon reveals the character of Gideon. His humble but lacks the faith and godly confidence to lead the Israelite army against the Midianites.

By human reasoning, there is no doubt that Gideon is not up for the challenge. Like Moses and Jeremiah , he tried convincing God that he was wrong in his chose and perhaps chose another person.

However, when God called Gideon a mighty man of valor, He is SERIOUS, and He is not mistaken. He means every word that He says. God equips those that he calls. Our sufficiency comes from God.

Paul says, "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God." 2 Cor .3:5

Indeed, Gideon initially has weak faith and lacks courage to overcome the enemy. But as we will see later, he will eventually rise as one of the most notable heroes of Israel. He will become, as what God said, a MIGHTY MAN OF VALOR.

Most of the Christians that God calls today are not the popular and successful people by this world's standards. The Apostle Paul tells us in I Corinthians 1:26-29 that God calls the weak and foolish of this world.

For you see your calling, brethren, that NOT many wise according to the flesh, NOT many mighty, NOT many noble, are called.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

God's choosing often comes unexpectedly. Gideon was just going about his work when God calls him. God knew where he was and what he was doing and interrupted him. Gideon was neither looking for a leadership role nor sitting around waiting for God's call to service.

God knew what He was about to make of Gideon. It was time Gideon knew too.

PRIVATE FAITHFULNESS IS A PREQUISITE TO PUBLIC USEFULNESS

Before Gideon can be used publicly, he must first clean up his own backyard. His family was breaking the 1st and 2nd commandments, with idols to Baal on their property.

So, the first assignment from the Lord, which was his 1st test of faith , was to destroy the altar of Baal and the Asherah idols. Then, Gideon was to build a proper altar and sacrifice his father's 7-year-old bull ,using the wood from the destroyed wooden idols of the goddess Asherah.

Because Gideon has not yet fully developed the boldness and courage to stand up against idolatry, he followed God's command during the night. So, when the morning comes, the Baal worshippers are enraged. When they found out that Gideon has done it, the men of the city talked to Joash, the father of Gideon. They want Joash to bring out his son so that they would put him to death.

But Joash wisely responded to their request and said: *"But Joash said to all who stood against him, "If Baal is a god, he could protect himself. Let him avenge himself, since his altar has been torn down ."*

The people are speechless and let Gideon live. Idols are powerless. If we use statues and images to worship God, our worship is in vain. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, said that anyone who wants to worship God must do so in SPIRIT (John 4:24) and not with the use of physical stones and statutes.

We must also remember that idols are the things we put between us and God. This means that it does not have to be like statues and images. Idolatry can take any form. It can be our career, possession, friends, families, habits, and sins. If you covet and consider something or someone more important than following God, then that is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

If you want to learn how to trust God, you must first set your own house in order. Before God can use you mightily, He must be

magnified in your own life, in your own home. Private worship prepares us for public power from God.

I John 5:21, keep yourselves free from idols .

The initial turning point for Gideon was when he tore down Baal's altar and built one for the Lord . Then, the Spirit clothed him we are told. Gideon became God's instrument and was now empowered to gather an army together .

GOD IS PATIENT WITH OUR FAITH PROCESS

God will set different events in motion to further improve the faith of Gideon.

After sending messengers throughout the land of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, to gather an army , Gideon started to doubt again and wanted the reassurance of God. Here we find the story of the "sign of the fleece."

Gideon is still not yet a man of deep faith. Gideon wants to find out if God would really deliver the Israelites from the hand of their enemy. He asked God to make the fleece wet while all the ground around it very dry.

The following morning, he has found the fleece in exact situation as what he has asked God. However, this did not convince Gideon enough. He once again asked God to make the ground wet while the fleece very dry. God answered His request.

An unshakable and strong faith is not something we develop overnight. Faith is tested and developed through time.

In this story, we can learn a vital lesson. God is more than willing to help Christians who struggle in strengthening their faith.

Gideon previously asked for a sign from God before this, and it was granted . The mere fact that an Angel of the Lord appeared to him and said , "*I am with thee*", it should have been enough to

convince him , but Gideon is still not sure. 3 signs been given him thus far and a 4th will ensue .

Knowing Gideon's frailties , God dealt with his skepticism ,patiently and graciously. Gideon was not spiritually mature yet, for the mature walk by faith and not by sight . Those of little faith look for signs . Those with greater faith look for their bibles .

Gideon's situation is reminiscent of the father who exclaimed to Jesus, *"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"* We can, therefore, ask for God's help when it comes to strengthening our faith. If we are willing to become more faithful, God is able and will help us deal with our unbelief.

Older Christian ought to be patient with younger Christians. We want results immediately and our impatience tempts us to give up on those believers who do not show the progress we expect of them .

God progressively revealed Himself to Gideon . And with each revelation He strengthen Gideon's faith and led him forward in his calling and mission .

SUCCESS IS DETERMINED BY GOD'S POWER, NOT OURS

After receiving the sign of the fleece from God that He will truly be with Gideon, it is now time to marshal the mighty army that will defeat the Midianites.

Gideon is ready to rumble , but God has other plans. Gideon was able to gather about 32,000 men to battle against their enemies. However, God deems this as too many for His purpose. God wants the numbers lowered . They might take the glory , attribute the victory to themselves , with that size of army.

Gideon must have thought to himself- we are need of more soldiers not less, for the Midianites number 135.000 strong. Gideon's faith is greatly tested by God.

To trim down the army of Gideon, the men who were faint-hearted were asked to go home. This cutting down has left Gideon with 10,000 men. This should be enough. But when Gideon is about to sigh a relief, God said to further decrease their number. Gideon has enough faith to obey God's instructions.

The Lord said gave directions for cutting the army still further by a water-drinking test at a spring . Those who knelt to drink were rejected and sent home. Those who lapped water in their hands , to drink from an alert posture, were selected. Only 300 qualified! For every 450 Midianite soldiers there would be 1 Israeli soldier. God loves disproportions! His work's out His glory through them.

Each of the 300 was equipped with a trumpet, a torch, and a clay jar. Gideon divided these men into three companies, and told them to surround the Midianite camp, to put their torches inside the clay jars and sent them on fire, and to wait for the signal of the trumpet. At the signal, the men broke the jars , revealing the torches, blew the trumpets, and shouted "*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!*"

The shout is remarkable , through a brilliant and astonishing strategy, Gideon's 300 men were able to subdue a vast army without swords. In the dark of the night , the Midianites were terrified by the noise, the trumpet blowing and light , that they turned on each other , killing one another in the confusion . Many fled and were chased and slaughter by the Israelites. They were able to overcome and obtained a great victory for the nation of Israel.

Today, the true followers of God are just a few in the world . They are not the majority, and their number is even compared to a little flock (Luke 12:32). As this might be the case, God has promised that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the true church (Matthew 6:18).

We must realize with God numbers are irrelevant ! God can magnify the little that we have . And Paul said , "*God strength is made perfect in our weakness....for when I am weak, I am strong!*"

Paul had this story in mind , when he wrote to the Corinthians , telling them , “ *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us .*” 2Cor 4: 7.

We are the clay jars, and the light of the God is in us. The breaking of the jars suggests we are to be broken and totally surrendered to Christ, so that his light can shine through us . We are exhorted to be the light of the world. The blowing of the trumpets represents the message of the Gospel sounded out, loud and clear .

Our weapons of war are not carnal , but spiritual ,mighty through to the pulling down of strongholds.

GOD MUST BE OUR RULER

The legendary and epic victory of Gideon against the Midianites soon spread throughout the land of Israel. Gideon suddenly attained a “superstar” status and many people started to look up to him. God’s leaders are most vulnerable following periods of victory .

The Israelites saw Gideon as someone who is fit to rule over them. Judges 8:22 tells us: “*Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.”*”

However, not succumbing to the temptation he was faced with , Gideon gave a decisive and humble reply: “*I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.*”

The Israelites having quickly lost sight of God , the One who truly saved them and gave them victory , want to make Gideon King. Our problems come when we start to put our trust and confidence in man rather than in God. Man is bound to commit mistakes and failure, but God will not fail us.

God should be the Ruler of our lives. God should have his rightful place in our lives. If we elevate man and *try to please men*, we *would not be servants of Christ* , Gal. 1:10.

Gideon was offered the kingship of Israel, but he refused. He did not succumb to that temptation ; however , he did unintentionally contribute to future idolatry in the land.

He requested a gift of the gold earrings which were taken as spoils from the enemy. With these he made a golden ephod (weighing about 50 pounds), which subsequently became an object of worship , becoming a snare to Israel and to Gideon because he had invaded the entitlements of the priesthood.

Overall , Gideon's life story gives us the encouragement that no matter what the situation we may be in right now, God will eventually work things out for good, for those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose.