

GIDEON

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The sixth in a series of articles on the Book of Judges

After Deborah, Barak, and Yael delivered Israel from the Canaanites, "the land had rest forty years" (Jdg. 5:31). Then the cycle of Apathy, Apostasy, Anomianism, and Anarchy began again. Once more the children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh. This time He delivered them into the hand of the Midianites. For seven consecutive years the Midianites invaded the land of Israel and plundered all the produce and livestock, leaving the Israelites starved and impoverished. The Bible says the Midianites came "as grasshoppers for multitude" and "left no sustenance for Israel." The Israelites were forced to flee to the mountains, where they hid in fear in dens and caves.

The Church of today has likewise been invaded by enemies that are as grasshoppers for multitude and leave no sustenance for Israel. Corruption, compromise, sin and worthiness have spread like a plague throughout the Body of Messiah, robbing God's people of spiritual sustenance and nourishment. God's people are in need of the milk and meat of the Word, but what they get from the pulpits is spiritual junk food. The sugar-coated teachings they hear provide some immediate, short-term gratification, but it is not spiritually healthy. And like junk food, it can be addictive. When the soul is fed nothing but spiritual junk food, it weakens the faith and courage of God's people. In their weakened state, they retreat from the enemy like the Israelites who fled to the mountains to hide out. Like the Israelites of old, they are concerned with being survivors instead of victors.

There was one man in the days of the Midianite invasion who was not satisfied with seeing the Israelites as mere survivors. This man's name was Gideon. One day he was threshing

some wheat to hide from the Midianites. The angel of Yahweh appeared and said to him, "Yahweh is with thee, thou mighty man of valour!"

Not knowing it was the angel of Yahweh, Gideon responded by saying, "Oh my lord, if Yahweh be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, 'Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?' But now Yahweh hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

Gideon knew that the present situation was not meant to be the norm for God's people. He knew that the norm should be victory, prosperity, and blessings, not defeat, poverty, and curses.

"Go in this thy might," Yahweh said to him, "and thou shalt save Israel from the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"

Yahweh will not send us to be deliverers until we understand that God wants His people to do more than merely survive. God wants His people to be victorious over sin. He wants us to be fruitful trees whose branches are heavy with the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal. 5:22f). The words "Go in this thy might" were spoken to a man who knew that defeat was not supposed to be the norm.

It is also significant that Gideon was threshing wheat when he received his call. He was doing what little he could do to help alleviate the problem and relieve some of the suffering of God's people. The Israelites who were doing nothing probably thought: "*The enemy is too strong; it's no use even trying to grow any crops at all.*" Gideon knew that even a small harvest is better than no harvest at all. The words "Go in this thy might" are spoken only to people who, like Gideon, are using whatever small measure of strength the Lord

has already given them. If we focus on our inabilities and weaknesses and human limitations and sit around waiting for God to magically transform us into spiritual supermen before we do anything, we will never hear the words "Go in this thy might."

Before Gideon could lead God's people to victory, there was some preparatory work that had to be done in Gideon's own backyard. Gideon was told by Yahweh to take his father's bullock and throw down the altar of Baal that belonged to his father, then cut down the grove and use the wood to burn the bullock on an altar to Yahweh.

Like Gideon, we need to clean up our own backyard before we can lead others to victory. It was a difficult thing for Gideon to do, because the altar of Baal belonged to his own father. Sometimes our obedience to the will of God offends our own families. Sometimes we have to get rid of idolatrous items or occultic objects that were gifts from well-meaning family members who were unaware of the spiritual implications of these things. In order to please his heavenly Father, Gideon had to risk offending his earthly father, and we sometimes have to do the same.

Gideon is probably best known for putting out the fleece and asking God for confirmation of his calling. The first time Gideon asked that the fleece be wet and the ground around it dry; the second time he asked that the ground be wet and the fleece dry. God graciously accommodated Gideon's request, and this gave him more confidence and courage. The story of Gideon's fleece often raises questions about the legitimacy of "putting out a fleece" (figuratively speaking) and asking God to perform some unusual sign to let us know His will for us. Is this a legitimate way for us to discern God's will?

There are several things that need to be considered. First of all, this was