

Gideon: Mighty Man of Valour

Before God's people had kings and queens, God brought judgement on them as He often does today; there may be difficult circumstances because they are not obedient to God's ways--and his warnings. The Midianites were a group used by God to give correction to His own people, who at that time were quite a problem to Him. The Israelites were worshipping other gods, not really gods at all, but idols of wood and of stone who could neither hear nor speak. This had happened before, but it just seemed they would never learn, and God was patient and longsuffering.

The people that put them in terror were the Midianites--not the ones in the south, but a bit to the east of Moab, a neighboring country. They were a people that had been almost conquered as the Israelites had come into the land, but their remnants had become a troublesome thorn in Israel's side. They were so uncivilized and brutal; they didn't even have a leader, at least it appeared that way. They just seemed to be a mob, coming into the land, destroying what they found, taking for themselves animals and food, leaving the Israelites with nothing with which to sustain themselves. People from Midian even brought many animals of their own, camels and cattle, to mercilessly ruin everything in their path. For seven years did they plunder and wreak havoc, each

year worse than those before...until at last the Israelites cried to the Lord for help. (It was for sure that Baal would not help them!)

God was probably wondering why they had taken so long to look to Him. He sent a prophet to remind them, "I am the God of your fathers, and I have cared for you through many crises. I warned you of serving foreign gods, but I will quickly forgive your wrongdoing and be your God again and give you deliverance."

One day Gideon, son of Joash, was out behind the barn, by the winepress, threshing the few stalks of wheat he was able to find still standing after the Midianite camels and cattle stampeded through the family field. He carefully threshed each one, being careful to spill none of the precious grain, all the while standing where he would not be spotted by more of the Midianite mauraders.

"Ho, mighty man of valour!" A voice came from behind him. Such a strange greeting, to one who is hiding, saving the little bit of food he can.

"Mighty? Bravery? Me?" asked Gideon to himself, for he understood what the angel said to him. The Word gives indication that this was the Lord himself coming to commission Gideon to deliver his countrymen from their enemies. (God is never at a loss as to what to do in time of crisis.)

"God is with you," He promised Gideon.

"If God is here, why are we having so much trouble come upon us?", answered Gideon. "God is letting us be beat to a pulp by our enemies. We are ruined!"

"I will make you very strong. I want you to deliver your people."

Gideon again protested, "But how could I possibly be the one you want? I am from a little family, and am the most insignificant person even in that family."

The Messenger wanted no more games. "I, Jehovah, will make you able to defeat all the plundering hordes of Midianites. They'll be gone in no time."

"If you're really God, prove it to me by doing some miracle. "Wait", he instructed. "Let me go get you a present at the house."

So before he ran away, Jehovah said to him, "I'll wait here".

Soon Gideon returned with some meat, broth, and bread, which he put on a nearby rock at Jehovah's instruction. Then fire came from the rock and consumed them. Jehovah disappeared. Gideon then knew that it was really God speaking to him. "Oh my, I have seen the Lord face to face!"

"Its alright," the Lord said, "you won't die. Build Me an altar here, and worship Me. Also take your father's best ox and a rope and pull down his family altar that is built to Baal's honor. Use the wooden idol that stands beside it for fuel to build the fire on an altar you will erect to Me."

Still afraid of stirring up trouble, Gideon asked ten of his father's men to help him, and they did their work at night. When someone came out the next morning, they asked, "Who tore down the altars that were here? They have insulted Baal!" Finding out that it was Joash's son, they protested to his father.

"Let Baal take care of himself", he retorted. "What an insult to a god, saying that you must take care of him!--just do away with whoever did the damage." From this time on, Gideon had the nickname, "Let Baal take care of himself."

It wasn't long before many soldiers gathered together against Israel in the valley of Jezereel. Gideon responded by calling Israel's fighting men from their homes, blowing a ram's horn for them to assemble. But still he needed assurance of God's presence. "God, if you want to use me to lead these in battle, let me know in this way: I'll put some fleece from a sheared ram on the floor in the threshing-house tonight. If you're sure I'm your man, make this fleece wet, but let the ground around it be dry in the morning. Then I'll know for sure.

The next morning, Gideon found the fleece just as he had said. Still not confident, he reversed the idea in order to let surrounding ground be wet, but the fleece dry. Never ending in patience, the Lord complied with this request, too. Then Gideon felt more secure, and he led his men to the side of a brook which was down in a valley. Jehovah said to him,

"Gideon, you have so many men that they will think the battle went their way because of their great numbers. Let anyone leave who is afraid."

So twenty-two thousand of his warriors left, but Jehovah still said, "There are still too many. Have them get a drink of water at the brook, and take only those men who drink from their hand--not those who kneel down with their lips in the water". Only 300 men were left after Gideon followed this order. "I'll kill all the enemy with this 300, promised Jehovah. Send everyone else home!"

At Gideon's direction, each man took his clay jar (which held his light) and a trumpet.

Jehovah, in the night, awoke Gideon and instructed him, "Take your men with you. The Midianites are in the valley below, and I'm about to deliver them into your hand. But just in case you're afraid, first sneak down into the valley and see what the Midianites are saying to each other." Gideon took a friend and slipped down the hill, into the camp of the enemy. He heard one soldier relate his dream to another: "I dreamed about a big loaf of bread tumbling down the hill and knocking our tent flat!" Fear showed its presence in his voice.

The very idea that such a thing could happen--so Gideon knew that indeed this was God speaking to him. He gathered his men, having them each carry a clay jar with a candle along with a trumpet. He said, "Everybody do what I do!" He

then took a group of 100 and went to the outskirts of the Midianite's campsite.

The trumpets blew, and the 100 Israelites screamed, "For God and for Gideon! The other 200 sounded off, and their clay jars were broken, the candles that had been inside now illuminated the mountainside.

The Midianites were in a panic, killing each other, and not realizing exactly what had happened. Many of that vast army were killed, and others ran away into the night, only to be caught and killed by Gideon's men, who were still quite surprised themselves by the results of Gideon's direction. Gideon even chased some of the Midianites, and summoned others of his group to stop the enemy army from escaping.

When Gideon's band had finished the chase and search operation, they had killed 120,000 Midianites with God's help. (In His word God says victory comes either by many or by few if the Lord works for us, I Samuel 14:6). Their land was free from the rule of wicked men; however, Israel was not grateful for all that Gideon had done for long. At first, they shouted, "Be our king, be our king!" To which Gideon responded, "No, I won't be your king, but give me all the earrings you've ever taken from your fallen enemies". They were glad to do so, but when this was made into a garment for worship of Jehovah, the people worshipped it.

When Gideon finally died after a long, fruitful life, the fickle people of Israel returned to the worship of idols,

forgetting all that God had helped them do. But during the time that Gideon lived, the people of God had peace and were never troubled again by the "host of the Midianites."