

**PENTECOST 6**  
**24 July AD 2011**

**Gideon: Judges 6**



Gideon is a judge not a prophet; he is one of Israel's heroes, he is a savior, small s. (The word "save" is used in verse 15, the RSV uses the term, "deliver".) Like Moses Gideon is a reluctant hero.

You may remember Moses did not want to be God's representative to Pharaoh; Moses had a number of reasons why he was not the right man for the job. But in the end he just said, "please send someone else." But you know *your Father*—God does not easily take "no" for an answer.

Israel is at a very low point in its national life. When we meet Gideon he is thrashing his grain in a winepress. He is not crazy. The winepress was probably carved into the rocky hillside, here he can keep his head low to avoid being seen by the enemy, the Midianites. If they saw him beating his wheat they may have attacked him and stolen the grain for themselves.

The Midianites are oppressing Israel. God's people have fled to the hills and live in caves. The people of the land are raiding Israel's grain fields, stealing the livestock, attacking the villages and ravaging the women. Israel doesn't quite get it, neither does Gideon, yet. *God allows this?* God allows this. God is withholding his protection as punishment, the people's hearts are not devoted to God.

Forgetting the First Commandment Israel has "*played the harlot;*" wanting to be like her neighbors *she* has gone the local gods. Gideon's question summarizes the feelings of all: and, it's our question too, isn't it?

*"...if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us... [when] the LORD [brought] us up from Egypt?"*

Israel feels abandoned. Like so many people, Gideon is looking for God and for signs of God's power and strength to manifest itself in Israel. They don't get it, they don't understand that their national strength lies in their love for and their devotion to God. Their *idolatry* is an offense to heaven and a sin which weakens them morally, spiritually and politically, making them a prey for their enemies.

God is not deaf to the cries of his people. *Now*, he is of a mind to change things. He is ready to do his people work again. But, God needs a leader, a hero. And, he

chooses Gideon. An angel salutes him, “*The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.*” The man hiding in a winepress thought, was the visitor mocking him? “What mighty man of valor is he talking to?” “You there in the winepress... go in might and save (deliver) Israel... the LORD God sends you!” Gideon presents his (dis) qualifications to the Lord:

- I’m from Manasseh, we’re only *half-a-tribe*
- My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, we have no standing
- And, I’m the runt, the least in my own family

St. Paul Gideon is not. Gideon is everyman’s hero. We can identify with him. We are so good at either finding or manufacturing excuses for not doing the right thing. Or, for telling God, “not me, choose someone else.” We are pretty good at looking the other way when God calls us—we too keep our head pretty low so he won’t see us standing there; or better yet, jumping in the winepress at the first sign of trouble. “Don’t get involved; look busy.”

Gideon is smart enough, so that when seeing a visitor from the Lord, he knows it’s time to pray, time to worship. Is this a test? (Now where did he put those offering envelopes?) Gideon prepares a suitable offering, a gift that is a genuine sacrifice in a time of scarcity. He prepared a goat and the gifts of bread. Keep in mind Gideon didn’t not want to be seen by the Midianites, thrashing wheat. But now he is preparing an offering for God, this means a fire; the smoke will be seen, the smell of roasting goat will garner attention. Presenting them to the heavenly visitor, they are received favorably and the angel vanishes. Gideon understands what this means. He is probably preparing himself to meet his maker. But he will not die, he will serve the Lord.

Gideon is too afraid to do the Lord’s work in the day, so when nightfall came, he with several servants tare down the local altar to Baal and the fertility pole that stands beside it called an Ashera. Today this would be vandalism. It was then too. People are kind of touchy about their fertility poles. In a very symbolic gesture, and one that was offensive to many, there Gideon erected a new altar and offered a bull upon it to the Lord God. (Compare the goat offered to God, with a bull. Baal is represented by a bull.) The men of the town are furious. Joash came to his son’s defense: “If Baal is a god, let Baal deal with my son.”

The battle begins. God is with Gideon and Gideon will test God, he will look for signs to see if the Lord is really with him. He calls to the neighboring tribes and Israel’s fighting men come out, with more force than you might have expected. They unite to stand against the Midianites who have heard about this insult to their Lord, Baal. But God will not let Gideon or Israel win this battle.

Recall Gideon's initial questions? "Where is God? What happened to all those wonderful deeds we heard our fathers talking about?" It's about to be answered for him.

God is not going to allow Israel to win this battle. He is going to win it in the sight of Israel. God will come to the rescue. He himself will be Israel's savior. The Lord spoke to Gideon on the eve of the battle, "you've got too many men. Send some home." Gideon sent home twenty-two thousand who said they were fearful. God said to Gideon again, still too many. So Gideon takes them to the water side and observes how they drink. And on the basis of how they scoop up the water to drink he sends a whole bunch more home, so that in the end Gideon is left with a mere three hundred warriors. With them God will work. But God will not use their might.

Remember, Gideon wants to know "where is the God who does wonders?" God will work those wonders. With torches and water jugs God will win the battle for Israel. And he did! They are about to learn that, "*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, it cannot be moved, but abides forever.*" To trust in the Lord, the Lord God, is to build on a solid rock-like foundation. Those who trust in the Lord come to know that he is a saving God.

The details of Gideon's victory are found in Judges 6 and 7. About now you should be wondering when is he going to get to the gospel. "*In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, the heir of all things...*" Gideon didn't know it, but he was a type of a savior, Gideon pointed to a greater savior yet to come. That savior too would win a battle for us, not with might and power, but with humility and lowliness and the power of divine love. The savior Gideon prefigured is of course our Savior, Jesus. He won the battle for us over sin, death and Satan; Jesus wins by dying on the cross—and not just dying, but offering his life for us. Jesus is our sacrifice, the only acceptable offering we can make to God.

The highest act of worship we can give God is to receive with grateful hearts, that which he gives us—Jesus.

So, put away your idols. Remember that the Lord alone is God. Those who trust in him are like Mt. Zion—that rock. Enthroned the Lord Jesus in your life, let him be your strength. Trust him. Behold, mighty things will happen.

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