

HEBREWS CHAPTER 11 – HEROES OF FAITH**Lesson #14****GIDEON
Hebrews 11:32**

*“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of **Gideon** and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets....”*

From specific and somewhat detailed examples of persons exercising faith, the writer of Hebrews now turns to generalities. To continue with detailed accounts about all the heroes of faith would require a voluminous written record. On the other hand, there are so many shining examples of faith that it would be a pity not to at least give some of them an honorable mention. So he names some without detailing their exploits of faith. This is the *Honorable Mention* section of the *Hall of Faith*.

The writer introduces them with a question: *“What more shall I say?”* or, as another translation has it, *“Is there any need to say more?”* (JB) And he doesn't say any more than to mention their names. One of these is Gideon, whose exploits of faith are recorded in Judges 6, 7 & 8. Let us consider Gideon's faith challenges in four steps:

ANALYZING GIDEON'S TIMES.

According to the book of Judges, chapter two, it was not the best of times, but it was the worst of times for the people of Israel. A cursory reading of the chapter reveals that it was for Israel:

A Time of Willful Disobedience. Judges 2:1-3

“Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: ‘I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorn in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’”

At this point in Israel's history, Joshua was an old and feeble man. In verse 8 of this chapter we read the sad news of the death of Joshua: *“Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died when he was one hundred and ten years old.”*

The sadder news we read two verses later: *“Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.”* (2:11-13)

The great trouble and distress which had fallen upon God's people had come because they had forsaken Him and had done evil in His sight. When we encounter continual and unusual difficulties from the enemies of the Lord, we need to stop and analyze our lives to see if the

trouble is because we are disobeying the Lord. If trouble comes because of obedience to the Lord, He will take care of us and defeat His enemies.

A Time Of Total Defeat. Judges 6:4-6

The sixth chapter of Judges paints a bleak picture of how the enemies of Israel operated: *“They would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.”* (Judges 6:4-6)

The enemies of Israel were running rampant over them, plundering their flocks, herds and crops at will. Israel was supposed to be victors but had become victims; those who were supposed to be overcomers were being overcome. Too often, even today, God’s people are disobedient and therefore are defeated. The most often prayed prayer is something like this: “God, bless me” or “Bless us.” God does not bless the “unblessable!” Only the obedient are “blessable.”

A Time of Rebellious Defection 2:7-13

The British author, J. Sidlow Baxter, commented: “Israel’s religious leaders were Modernists! They had turned away from the good old gospel of salvation by faith in the God who had brought Israel out of Egypt. They had said: ‘How do we know that Jehovah is the only real God? or that He is even the greatest of the gods? After all, we have never seen Him; nor has anybody else ever seen Him. How do we really know that our forefathers were right in what they said about Him? We have only their word for it. They were probably mistaken. Look at the magnificent temples and impressive gods of the surrounding nations. No wonder they despise our own inferior-looking religion. Their gods can be seen. There can be no doubting their reality. Why should we cling to the worn-old faith of yesterday? Give us modern gods and an up-to-date religion!’”

Does that sound like the talk that we hear from leaders and those whom they lead today in non- bibliocentric ministries today? Paul warned Timothy of this danger as follows: *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”* (II Tim.4:3,4)

The Adamic nature’s desire to defect from God, to avoid the way of righteousness and display independence from the Creator is an ever present temptation for the sons and daughters of Adam. The nation of Israel and God’s chosen people today are no different in that respect. We must ever, individually and collectively, as the church of Jesus Christ, be on guard against the temptation to yield to the old nature instead of our new nature.

A Time of Divine Displeasure. Judges 2:14

“And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.”

A Time of Repeated Deliverance 2:16-19

“Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges.” (v.16,17) And, continuing, *“And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.”* (v.19)

We shake our heads in wonderment and say, “Why did they repeatedly revert to self-will and so easily forget God’s dealings with them?” The answer is closer to us than we might think. We have but to look into our own hearts and review some of our own past attitudes and reactions to God’s instructions to us in His Word and from good counsel we have repeatedly heard from God’s messengers.

God appointed Judges over His people to lead them - thirteen different Judges. *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* (Judges 17:6) God was their King but they refused to obey Him. Gideon was one of the judges in Israel. The Lord is about to get the attention of His people and appoint Gideon to lead them to victory. Let us not forget that: *“When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him.”* (Isaiah 59:19)

ANNOUNCING GIDEON’S TASK. Judges 6:11-16.

The call and commissioning of Gideon is recorded as follows:

“Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!” Gideon said to Him, “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.” Then the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?” So he said to Him, “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.” And the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.”

These verses contain so many interesting insights, not only about Gideon, but also about God and His dealings with us. The developments certainly have their serious side but there is also a very human and even humorous side to what unfolds in this passage.

The Appearance of The LORD. v.11

“Now the angel of the LORD came.” and v.12 *“the angel of the LORD appeared.”*

Gideon was a Judge in Israel. Suddenly the angel of the LORD appeared to him and revealed that he had been divinely chosen be the deliverer of God’s people. Who was *“the angel of the LORD”*? The word “LORD,” when it appears in all capital letters, means “Jehovah.”

Warren W. Wiersbe writes regarding the phrase *“the angel of the LORD”* as follows: “The angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is generally agreed to be our Lord Jesus Christ who came to earth temporarily on occasion to deliver special messages or to accomplish special tasks.”

He appeared to Haagar in Gen. 16; Abraham, Gen. 22; Jacob, Gen. 31:11; Moses, Ex. 3; Joshua in Josh. 5:13-15, etc.

The Assignment From The LORD. Judges 6:14-16.

(1) *It was prefaced by a commendation.*

“The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!” (Judges 6:12)

(2) *It included a commission.*

“Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?” (Judges 6:14)

(3) *It concluded with a confirmation.*

“And the LORD said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.’” (Judges 6:16)

The Apprehension of Gideon.

When we are first introduced to him he presents a very pathetic picture. A fearful Gideon was threshing wheat in a place which was hidden from public view. He was hiding from the Midianites and threshing wheat is a winepress! Is there something wrong about this picture? Separating the grains of wheat from the chaff in a winepress? Threshing floors were usually highly visible, located on a hill or knoll, where the wind would blow the chaff away.

Another insight regarding Gideon sticks out in this passage and that is that Gideon seems to have had a very low self-image. When the angel of the LORD said to him, *“Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel....”* Gideon replied, *“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.”*

Hiding in a winepress to winnow grain is not indicative of courage, is it? Here was a timid young man whom the Lord called. Gideon felt utterly unfit and unworthy for such a task and he told the Lord so. However, he did not dissuade the Lord. He finally took God at His word and the timid Gideon became a terror to his enemies.

Gideon was transparent in his conversation with the Lord. When the LORD said, *“The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!”* Gideon was bold to reply, *“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.”* (6:12,13)

We must admit, that at this point in Gideon’s life, he was an unlikely candidate for the Hall of Faith. But, at the same time, we must remember that faith for all of us grows. The following actions of Gideon prove that he began with a weak faith.

The Assurance Gideon Sought. Judges 6:36-40

“So Gideon said to God, ‘If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said— look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.’ And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, ‘Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.’ And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.”

Seeking for signs from God is evidence of an immature faith. Immature faith needs signs for reassurance; mature faith takes God at His word and obeys.

I said earlier that the scriptural account of the call of Gideon contains “many interesting insights, not only about Gideon, but also about God.” Some of the insights about God that are evident in this passage of scripture are:

- God is interested in us personally. He knew Gideon, knew where he was and what he was doing.
- God is patient with us even when we question Him as Gideon did.
- God has a purpose for each of us. For Gideon it was to lead Israel to victory.
- God’s callings are His enablings. He said, *“I will be with you.”*
- God’s promises are fuel for our faith: *“you shall defeat the Midianites.”*
- God honors Spirit-annointed leadership: *“the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.”* (Judges 6:34)

APPRAISING GIDEON’S TROOPS. Judges 7:1-7

Sizing up the troops.

- (1) The original size of Gideon’s army. Judges 7:3 reveals that Gideon originally had 32,000 troops.
- (2) The original size of the enemy army. Judges 8:10 sets the original number of the enemy’s army at 135,000.

Sorting out the troops.

God said Gideon had too many troops even though Gideon’s army was smaller than the enemy army. These are the Lord’s words: *“And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.’”* And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained. (Judges 7:2-3)

General Gideon saw 22,000 of his troops leave him and go home because they were afraid. That left him with 10,000 men. If you had been Gideon, would your faith been shaken? But that was not the end of the reduction of Gideon’s troops. God continued speaking and said:

“The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ the same shall not go.” So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, “Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink.” And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the LORD said to Gideon, “By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place.” (Judges 7:4-7)

The God Who engineered the destruction of the walls of Jericho and ordered Joshua to march his army around it, blow their trumpets and shout, now chooses a stranger way to defeat the remaining enemies of Gideon and his people. This time, instead of telling the fearful to go home, God instructs Gideon to conduct a drinking test at the stream. The Lord said, *“I will test them for you there.”*

What was the test? Those who put their faces in the water and “supped” were to be separated from the “lappers!” To me, this is humorous. I find it amusing the way God chose to reduce Gideon’s army. The 300 who lapped water from their hand were to make up the force that was to launch the attack. It has been suggested that they brought the water up to their mouths in order to keep on the lookout for danger. I wonder what Gideon thought of the process. The 300 must have been trustful souls to be willing to go to battle with such a small force. When God is on our side the size of the enemy is no problem.

APPLAUDING GIDEON’S TRIUMPH. (Judges 7:19-22)

In the darkness of night, three hundred men smashing pitchers, waving torches and shouting created frenzy in the enemy camp resulting in the Midianite troops panicking and killing each other. Gideon’s swordsmen made quick work of the remnant that remained and his 300 men experienced the thrill of victory and were delivered from the agony of defeat. One could say that the attack was a “smashing” success! The official report of the campaign reads: *“Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon.”* (Judges 8:28) “Little is much if God is in it!”

CONCLUSION

There is much more to Gideon’s life and ministry. We have covered the highlights, but unfortunately, there are some lowlights in his life as well. But in spite of them, God included him in the *Honorable Mentions* in Hebrews chapter eleven.

When we first see Gideon he presents a very pathetic picture. He was hiding from the enemy, he did not feel he was up to the task to which God called him. But God encouraged him, emboldened him and enabled him so that he became a great leader.

Gideon became one of God’s extraordinary ordinaries! Just like I Corinthians 1 says: *“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.” (I Cor.1:26-29)

To answer God’s call demands a courageous faith. Are you engaged in the special task to which God has called you? Let us be encouraged to step out by faith when God gives us a mission for *“For with God nothing will be impossible.”* (Luke 1:37)

It doesn’t take a mountainous faith to move mountains! Jesus said, *“...if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* (Matthew 17:20)

It is not the **S-I-Z-E** of our faith but the **S-O-R-T** and the **S-E-T** of our faith – that is, the One in Whom we place our faith – that is approved by God. It is not the quantity of faith but the quality of faith; not how much faith but what we do with the faith we have that gets God’s blessing.

And remember

“WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD”

Hebrews 11:6

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Consider some of the faith challenges in Gideon’s life in the portions of scripture we have covered.

1. Faith is for the coward as well as for the courageous.
2. Faith obeys the call of God even when things look hopeless.
3. It takes faith to arouse others to obey God and fight for a righteous cause.
4. It takes faith to lean on the arm of the Almighty rather than the armaments of your army.
5. It takes faith to keep fighting when God reduces the size of your forces.