

Introduction: The Spirit of the LORD Clothed Gideon (6:33-35)

³³ Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴ But the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. ³⁵ And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them.

In chapter 6, we saw that Gideon was cowering in a winepress, threshing wheat.

He is hiding – afraid – discouraged – beaten down...

The Midianites, the Amalekites,

and the people of the East have been raiding and plundering –

and every time they come, Israel has been brought very low.

We heard last time that when the people of God cried out for help,

God sent a prophet who rebuked the people for disobeying the LORD.

“I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God;

you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.’

But you have not obeyed my voice.” (6:10)

Then, when the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon,

Gideon protested that he was too weak and small to save Israel from Midian,

and even when Gideon accepted God’s call,

he went by night (in secret) to destroy the altar of Baal.

But now he is clothed with the Spirit, and so he goes forth with power,
trampling down his enemies... right?

Well, no.

As a matter of fact, Gideon remains fearful and unsure of what to do.

Gideon is hard to figure out!

Does he trust God?

Well, yes – sort of – at least mostly, when it matters most!

In that way, Gideon is a lot like us!

It is somewhat comforting to find that Gideon makes it into the hall of faith
in Hebrews 11.

Many of the heroes of faith that you find in Hebrews 11 are not especially impressive.

But then again – that’s the point of *faith*.

The impressive thing is what *God does*

through his weak and fearful people.

But this is what God had promised back in Deuteronomy.

The book of Judges always has Deuteronomy in the background.
God had promised in Dt 3:22 –

“You shall not fear them [the nations],
for it is the LORD your God who fights for you.”

And then in the prologue to the Shema – in Dt 6:2,

“that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son
and your son’s son,
by keeping all his statutes and his commandments,
which I command you, all the days of your life,
and that your days may be long.”

Whom do you fear?

Do you fear the LORD?

Or do you fear your enemies?

Do you fear the people around you?

There are seven instances of fear in Judges 6-7.

Four of them we heard last time:

v15 – how can I save Israel? (like Moses at the burning bush)

v17 – show me a sign! (like many...)

v22 – terrified that he has seen the angel of the LORD (like Manoah)

v27 – goes by night to do the work God called him to do (Nicodemus?!)

In our passage we get three more examples of fear –

the two tests, and then in verse 10 – “if you are afraid...” (still!!)

And yet Gideon is held up in Hebrews 11 as a hero of faith!

Why is he a hero of faith?

Because he perfectly obeyed God?!!

Uh – not even close!!

He is a hero of faith because *when the moment came* –

in spite of all his weakness, fearfulness, and frailty,

in spite of all the failings in everything else! –

he did what God called him to do!

As an example of this failings, look at verses 36-40:

1. Gideon Puts the LORD to the Test (6:36-40)

³⁶ Then Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, ³⁷ behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.”

³⁸ And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew

from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. ³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, “Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew.” ⁴⁰ And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

The text is quite clear that Gideon is acting in *unbelief* at this point!

Gideon refers to the fleece as a *test*.

This is the word used in Deuteronomy 6:16 –

“you shall not put the LORD your God to the *test*,
as you tested him at Massah.”

The word is used often to refer to how God tests his people –
but it is only used of testing God in the negative sense!

(It’s the word used in the Psalms to speak of Israel’s grumbling).

Gideon’s fleece is *not* about discerning the will of God.

The will of God has already been revealed.

Gideon’s fleece is about how God is so determined to save his people,
that he will use a man who openly rebels against him,
in order to do it!

Just to be clear: you should *never* ever use Gideon’s fleece as a positive example
of how to seek the will of God!

Gideon is trying to get out of doing what God commands!

It’s as bad as Jonah fleeing on a ship for Tarshish (or worse –
because Gideon is doing precisely what God forbids!).

He is putting the LORD his God to the test.

2. The LORD Refines Gideon (7:1-18)

But the LORD does not give up on Gideon.

After all, if God gives up on Gideon, then what?

Do you have a better hero in mind?

The picture in Judges is that Israel has abandoned their worship of the LORD!

If God gives up on Gideon,
then God will give up on you.

But quickly let me assure you!

God does not give up on Gideon!

Gideon sinfully puts God to the test –

and God has mercy on Gideon, and *even grants what Gideon asks!*

The first night, the fleece is wet and the ground is dry.

The second night, the ground is wet and the fleece is dry!

But God is not to be trifled with!

He does not let Gideon get away with his unbelief!

(this is amazing!!)

Sometimes people say that God loves you *just the way you are!!*

Oh! That would be awful!!

It would be miserable to be loved *just the way I am!*

I don't know anybody who loves me just the way I am!

I'm a sinner!

I do and say things that hurt God – and hurt others!

You see, what God is *so much better* than love you just the way you are!

God loves you – and sent his only-begotten Son to die for your sins –
and raised him from the dead,

so that you might be transformed into the image of his Son!

Watch what God does with Gideon!

7 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

That's more important than it sounds.

The spring of Harod means “the spring of trembling” – or the “spring of terror.”

And the hill of Moreh means “the hill of the teacher.”

And notice where the two camps are!

Gideon is encamped beside the spring of trembling.

Midian is encamped by the hill of the teacher!

Through Midian, God is going to *teach* his fearful, trembling servant!

And so God starts by pruning Gideon's army.

a. The Fearful and Trembling Sent Home (v2-3)

² *The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’”*

This is again referring back to Deuteronomy –

where Moses warned Israel against thinking that their own might could save them!

And so the LORD tells Gideon:

³ *Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'*" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.

You who are encamped at the spring of Harod –
if you are *hared* then you may flee to your homes!

God goes directly at the fundamental problem.

If you are afraid.
If you are fearful and trembling,
then go home.

I don't need you!

(This is the command in Dt 20, verse 8 – those who are fearful should not go into battle)

Why didn't Gideon go home?

After all, he was afraid!

The reason is simple:

God has clothed Gideon with his Spirit.

That doesn't mean that Gideon is perfect!

(Gideon, after all, has just put the LORD to the test –
in direct violation of Dt 6:16!)

Rather, Gideon is being sanctified!

He is becoming more and more of the Spirit-clothed warrior that God calls him to be.

He is learning how to trust God!

Okay, wow!

I had a pretty good army with 32,000!

Now I've got 10,000.

We'll be at a disadvantage – but if God is with us,
I think we can still pull it off!!

But the LORD wants Gideon to trust *him only*.

None of this "we can still pull it off" business!!

John Wesley was right to say "without God, man cannot –
without man, God will not."

After all – what happens if Gideon goes home?

Then God does not save Israel! (this time)

Because, what happens if Jesus abandons his mission?

Then God does not save us!!

Only God can save!

Salvation belongs to the LORD!

But God has determined to use Gideon in order to save Israel!

(and he uses this story to prepare us for the greater and more glorious salvation wrought in the God-man, Jesus Christ! – the second person of the Holy Trinity, who joined himself to our humanity, in order that he might join *us* to God!!)

And that's why God says again:

b. With the 300 I Will Save You (v4-8)

⁴ And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go."

The word for "testing" is a different word – this is the word often translated "refine" – but the connection between Gideon's "test" and God's "test" is important.

Gideon wrongly tested God twice.

Now the LORD refines Gideon twice in rebuke!

It's arguable that if Gideon had trusted God from the start, then Gideon could have taken 32,000 men to battle with him! But because he didn't trust God – and put the LORD to the test, God says, "okay, you want to do it the hard way? That's not hard for me!!"

⁵ So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." ⁶ And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. ⁷ And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home." ⁸ So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

Many commentators have expended considerable energy to try to figure out why lapping water is better than kneeling down to drink water...

but the text actually explains the point very clearly:

"with the 300 men who lapped *I will save you*"

Do you hear this?

It's not with the 300 men who were keen and watchful...

It's not even with the 300 men who believed me...

(After all, all 10,000 believed God!

They were not afraid of the Midianites.

There was no command from God "you must lap water by hand!")

It's an arbitrary test, given in order to reduce the size of the army
to a helpless remnant!

If Israel is going to win this battle, then God had better show up!!!

But the refining of Gideon is not just a matter of knocking him down to size!

God is kind to his weak and fearful servants!

He often gives us tangible signs of hope and encouragement!

2. The Midianite Dream: The LORD Has Given Midian into Your Hand (v9-18)

⁹ *That same night the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. ¹⁰ But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. ¹¹ And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp."*

Gideon hears this and takes God at his word!

(Notice that Gideon is beginning to trust the LORD!)

Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. ¹² And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. ¹³ When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, "Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat." ¹⁴ And his comrade answered, "This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp."

It's one of those curious things.

Who was this "comrade"?

And why does this supposedly Midianite comrade
have a correct interpretation of the dream?

You could probably come up with a hundred different backstories!

But however God orchestrated it all,

Gideon shows up at just the moment that the man tells the dream –
and then hears the comrade's answer:

"This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel;
God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp."

Yes, God has chosen to use *this man* – Gideon – a man of Israel –

but it is still *God* who has given Midian into his hand!

When Gideon hears the dream and its interpretation –

¹⁵ As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand.”

This is Gideon’s finest hour.

He doesn’t start well (remember, his father was a Baal-worshiper!).

He doesn’t end well.

But at the right time – he trusts God and acts accordingly!!

And notice that there is no direction from God as to how he is to proceed.

How is he supposed to use these 300 men?

This is where God calls Gideon to use his sanctified common sense!

When you only have three hundred men, how do you attack a massive army?!

¹⁶ And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. ¹⁸ When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”

3. The Battle Belongs to the LORD (7:19-25)

a. Gideon’s Three Hundred Heralds (v19-22)

¹⁹ So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. ²⁰ Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”

Usually a trumpet signals a company to attack.

So if there are three hundred trumpets sounding,

that will sound like there are three hundred companies attacking

(remember that Gideon had 32,000 troops a couple days ago!).

So it might sound like the whole Israelite army is attacking!

Likewise, the torches would light the way for a larger group...

But of course, once the Midianites realize there is almost no one there,

Gideon and his 300 will be overwhelmed.

So, it's *not* a piece of military genius.

He's just doing the best he can – with the very real understanding
that he is trusting God to show up and do what he promises!

“For the LORD and for Gideon”

And then notice what they do:

²¹ Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled.

The whole Israelite army – all three hundred men – stand in their place.

They have no swords.

They have trumpets in one hand, and torches in the other.

They are helpless and vulnerable.

They are just standing there around the Midianite camp!

How does God defeat Midian?

It's not through some mighty warrior.

It's through 300 guys standing around,
playing music, shining lights, and announcing the coming of the LORD.

That's why I call them the 300 heralds.

The Greeks tell their stories about the 300 warriors

who stood firm against the thousands of the Persian immortals.

Judges tells the story of the 300 heralds who stood outside the Midianite camp,

blowing trumpets, holding torches,

and proclaiming the coming of the LORD.

²² When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah,^[a] as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

We heard of trumpets being blown at Jericho – when the walls came tumbling down.

Now the trumpets are blown at the Midianite camp –

and the Midianites come tumbling down!

The LORD set every man's sword against his comrade.

Perhaps the dream of the one man had been shared by others?

Perhaps God used internal conflicts between the various allies?

However God did it – the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade!

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not understand it!

This is why Jesus calls us to let our light shine before men.

We sometimes want to say, “But Lord, if they see us, they will come after us!”

Do you trust God?

Do you fear him?

Or do you fear your enemies more?

Sure – it is entirely possible – indeed, it is highly likely,
that your enemies will come after you!

But Jesus never promised that the Christian life would be easy!

No, Jesus promised that we would suffer.

Jesus promised that following him would lead us to the cross!

But he also promised that this road would lead beyond the cross to glory!

And he purifies and refines his people.

He brings his servant through the refining and brings him to glory,
together with all his people!

Notice how this works for Gideon and Israel.

Gideon’s army is pruned – refined – down to 300 men.

God brings a great deliverance through his holy remnant.

And then he completes the victory through the triumph of the whole people!

b. The Slaughter of Oreb and Zeeb (v23-25)

²³ *And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian.*

Think of where this is going.

God chose Israel out of all the nations

(and not because they were the most righteous or powerful).

He refined and pruned Israel down to David – and through David down to Jesus.

He brought the great deliverance *through* the righteous remnant of One –
the light of the world who walked through the valley of darkness.

But that’s not the end of the story!

Jesus now calls us out to engage in our spiritual warfare.

God has already gone before us to win the great victory.

That victory is one – and the end of the story is assured!

But that doesn’t mean that the story is over!

²⁴ Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. ²⁵ And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.

We are called out into the mop up operation!
Those who were afraid and fled to their homes –
now return (since victory is assured!)
and go forth to battle.

But don't think too poorly of them!
How different are we?

Would we dare to walk by faith – if Jesus had not gone before us?!

In the same way, now that the LORD has given Israel the victory,
Israel now goes forth in faith and seals off the Jordan River –
killing the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb.

Maybe you weren't among the 300 whom God selected to be there on the front lines.
But when the Spirit-clothed Deliverer called you – you showed up.

And because Jesus is the light of the world –
and you have been united to Jesus –
therefore, you are the light of the world!

Jesus himself comments that people do not “light a lamp and put it under a basket” –
unless you are Gideon!!

But Jesus' point is that *he is* the Gideon who commands you now to break the clay pot!
Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works
and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Don't be afraid of what the world sees!

After all, what will the world see?
Your love for God.
Your love for one another.
Your love for your neighbor!