

Lessons from the Judges (Part 3)

The Growth of Gideon's Faith

By John R. Gibson

“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” Mark 9:24

What kind of man was Gideon? In Judges 7 he is a man of tremendous faith leading Israel to a victory that defied all odds. But in the latter portion of chapter eight we see a man with feet of clay as he made some grievous mistakes we considered in Part 2 of this series and we must not fail to learn from those, but as we conclude this series I want us to see that the Gideon of great faith can be a great encouragement to us as a vivid demonstration that a weak faith can become a strong one.

When we are first introduced to Gideon things are bleak for the people of Israel. The Midianites frequently robbed the people of the produce of their land and even forced the people to seek refuge in the “dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains” (Jdgs. 6:1-6). With this level of oppression was Gideon formulating a plan of action by which he would rally the troops and lead Israel to victory? No, the first time we meet Gideon he is threshing wheat in a winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites (6:11). When the angel addressed him as a “mighty man of valor” and told him that he would deliver Israel, Gideon protested that he was an insignificant member of an insignificant family (6:12-15).

Yet, when the Lord gave him the assignment of tearing down his father's altar to Baal, Gideon did it—under cover of darkness because he was afraid (6:27). And don't miss the fact that after first gathering the troops and then whittling them down to 300 at the instruction of the Lord, he was told that if he was still afraid he could go down to the camp of the Midianites and would be given another sign? Did Gideon decline this offer and say that he already seen enough? No, he took his servant Purah with him to the camp so that his hands would be strengthened (7:9-11).

None of this is intended to denigrate or minimize the magnitude of faith displayed by this man who is included among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, but is instead intended to assure us all that we can become more than we are today. We may not feel as though we are mighty people of valor and we may not be that today, but like Gideon we can become such.

The same men who boldly proclaimed Jesus on Pentecost and went on to preach the gospel everywhere despite persecution and even martyrdom in the case of most were frequently chided by Jesus for their little faith and failed Him on the night of His arrest. But just as Gideon is not remembered for being down in the winepress, the apostles are not remembered as the men whose faith failed them in the both. Their faith grew and so can ours.

How do we become a Gideon or James or Thomas? Perhaps we should start with a recognition that our faith is not as strong as it could be. Be like the father of the demon-possessed child who confessed and implored, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24)! Don't be afraid to admit to God that which He already knows, but is willing to help with. Pray!

Then spend time with the faith-building word (Rom. 10:17). Read the stories of the Almighty working with and through His people to accomplish great things. Read and then meditate on the many

men and women of faith found throughout Scripture and as you read of how they “through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, [and] turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Heb. 11:33-34, you just might find your own faith increasing, your resolve strengthening, and your determination growing.

And then start where you are. It is obvious that Gideon’s faith was not where it would one day be when he was told to destroy the altar to Baal or else he would not have felt compelled to act under the cover of darkness, but let’s recognize that he acted. Don’t miss the fact that when Gideon asked for the signs of the fleece in Jdgs. 6:36-40 he had already sounded the trumpet to gather an army to him. And though he was fearful enough to take the Lord up on the offer to go down to the camp, he had trusted God enough to whittle his army down from thirty-two thousand to three hundred. In a similar way, the apostles faith was not where it would be one day, but when Jesus called them to follow, they left homes, jobs, etc. to follow Him. If all we can do is tear down an idol when everyone is asleep, let’s start there and then with prayer and study of the Scripture our faith can grow to be like that of Gideon and the apostles.

The period of the judges can teach us many great lessons and a number of them are quite negative, but let’s not miss the inspirational faith and its development in the life of Gideon. Let’s learn from this and...

Pray

Read.

Act.

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