

September 13, 2009/ Judges 6:1-24 (ESV¹)

last week we had the call of Joshua ... this week it is the call of Gideon ...

Jdg 6:1 The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.

Jdg 6:2 And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.

Jdg 6:3 For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them.

Jdg 6:4 They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey.

Jdg 6:5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number--both they and their camels could not be counted--so that they laid waste the land as they came in.

Jdg 6:6 And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD.

the people had peace for 40 years following God's provision of the judges Barak and Deborah ... but they turned away from God and God gave them over to persecution from the Midianites ... these were Bedouin nomads from the desert to the east ... these were herders, traders, raiders descended from Abraham through Keturah ... these people swooped out of the desert on their camels and laid waste to the fields planted by the Israelites ... for what it is worth, the Midianites seem to be the first people to use camels as mounts for an army of raiders ... the Amalekites (see **Exodus 17:8**) were the first people to take up arms against the Israelites as they come out of Egypt ... in terms of both numbers and destructiveness, the Scriptures liken these peoples to locusts ... the Israelites were forced to hole up in caves to hide from them ... the people cry out to God for help ...

Scripture never portrays the political or military reversals of a people as something issuing from technological or political or economic causes ... these are moral consequences of real moral wrongs on the part of those suffering ... the people of Israel have brought this on themselves through their apostasy, but they at least have the good sense to recognize that there is to be relief it must come from God ... we 21st century people are too "smart" to see things in anything like these terms ... but if we are to have Biblical minds, this is the way we will see things ...

Jdg 6:7 When the people of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of the Midianites,

Jdg 6:8 the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage.

Jdg 6:9 And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land.

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Jdg 6:10 And 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."

so we're not told the name of this prophet ... but he comes with the word of the LORD and lays out exactly what is happening for the people ... their fundamental failure was the failure to keep in front of themselves the implications of their covenant relationship to the I AM ... they had been forgetful of His care in the past, they were disobedient, and they were failing to trust Him for His care in the present ... it's interesting that this prophet doesn't say what further is now going to happen on the basis of this forgetfulness and ingratitude of the people ... he lays out what has happened and is happening, but leaves the people in tension over what comes next ...

Jdg 6:11 Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.

Gideon isn't out in the open threshing where the wind can blow away the chaff, but hiding out in a winepress, hoping to save some grain from the raiders ... this is a much smaller place than would normally be used for threshing ... the fact that he's here (probably threshing with a rod instead of with a threshing sledge drawn by oxen) may also indicate the meagerness of what he has salvaged from the raiders ...

Jdg 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."

there is more than a little irony here ... this guy is hiding in a winepress doing his threshing, he's part of a nation that has been reduced to abandoning their fields and hiding in caves ... and the LORD can call him a "mighty man of valor" ... NOT in ordinary human terms, that is for sure! ... only by God's grace is he and will he be this ...

Jdg 6:13 And Gideon said to him, "Please, sir, 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, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."

here we are, you and I with Gideon .. we whine that the work of God is something in the past and that we've sure never seen it ... we hold hard times for us are evidence that we've been abandoned ... after all, life is supposed to be comfortable ... comfort is more important than correction ... woe is me ... woe, woe, woe ... do we not see what ridiculous arrogance this is? ... we are the center of the universe? ... our situation is different from those who went before us? ... God is no longer working in the way He once did for His glory and the good of His people? ... at its heart, this is arrogance and foolishness on our part ... far better that Gideon and we simply get on with trusting Him ...

Jdg 6:14 And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

GO ... do I not send you? ... here is the LORD's plain commission ...

Jdg 6:15 And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

this is probably not literally true, but it is an honest summary of Gideon's apparent suitability for this assignment ... Gideon is not an obvious choice for a deliverer of Israel from a human point of view ... but then, God's great power and glory are seen in what He does through weak human beings ... it is His way to consistently use what humans consider to be weak to accomplish His purposes ...

Jdg 6:16 And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

in verse 14 was the commission to go ... here is the promise that makes going possible ... I WILL BE WITH YOU ... those have been the commission and the promise from the calling of Abraham to this very present moment ...

Mat 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Mat 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

it's especially striking in verses 14 and 16 that God is speaking to a single individual ... I will be with you (singular) and you (singular) shall strike the Midianites ... not only does Gideon see himself as least in a weak clan, but it's just him who is being addressed ... he has no older brother to lean on like Moses had ... it's just him ... BUT "just him," with the promise of the presence of God!! ...

Paul in 2 Corinthians ... **2Co 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

Jdg 6:17 And he said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me.

Jdg 6:18 Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return."

it seems like Gideon may not quite realize that this is the I AM Himself ... Gideon wants a sign and offers a present ...

Jdg 6:19 So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them.

this is a BIG meal ... the flour alone is 34-45 lbs ...

Jdg 6:20 And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so.

Jdg 6:21 Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

Jdg 6:22 Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."

I love this ... "then Gideon perceived" ... ya think Gideon might conclude that there's something going on here that is a bit beyond the ordinary? ... and as it dawns on him that this has been a physical appearance of the God of the Bible, he's properly terrified ... him, a frail and imperfect creature, before the perfect Creator ... but God is merciful and gracious ...

Jdg 6:23 But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."

God speaks peace/shalom to Gideon ... this is not only personal welfare for Gideon, this is restoration of sanity and normal life for Israel ...

Jdg 6:24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.