

GIDEON'S BAND TRIUMPHANT.

– *JUDGES 7:1-8 – NOVEMBER 30 –*

"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man."

– **Psa. 118:8.**

GIDEON was one of the judges of Israel raised up by the Lord. He delivered his people from the Midianites who had invaded Palestine and taken possession of its most fertile part, pillaging the country of its produce. Under God's special covenant with Israel we know that he would have protected them from these invaders had they remained faithful to him. We are not surprised, therefore, that the narrative shows that the Israelites at this time had succumbed to the idolatrous influences of the Canaanites who still dwelt in the land. Gideon's father was one of the chief men of his tribe and district, and upon his plantation he had erected a statue to Baal in the midst of a consecrated grove, on a hilltop. Notwithstanding this established idolatry in the home, Gideon appears to have had considerable knowledge of the true God and of the deliverances effected by him for his people in the past, and when conversing with his angel visitor he shows not only his knowledge of the Lord's dealings in the past, but his surprise that he had ceased to care for his people. It did not seem even to occur to him that the Lord's disfavor, as manifested in the successes of the Midianites against Israel, was on account of Israel's disloyalty to the Lord in idolatry, etc. It is probable that this same sentiment pervaded the nation in general and that, in some sense of the word, they respected Jehovah at the same time they worshipped Baal also.

God's favors to spiritual Israel and his protection are along spiritual lines against spiritual enemies and spiritual difficulties; and yet, how few spiritual Israelites when they get into spiritual difficulties realize that it must, in some sense of the word, be traceable to the Lord's providences! How few of them properly look to see to what extent their spiritual adversities, weaknesses, coldness, alienation from the Lord,

etc., are due to the permission of some kind of idolatry in their hearts! Not an idolatry, probably, that entirely ignores the Lord; but one which, while thinking favorably of his spiritual blessings and victories of the past, simply wonders at his disfavor of the present, and fails to recognize that it is impossible to serve at the same time both God and Mammon; that God's favor and close communion and protection can not be expected while we permit in our hearts a rival reverence for wealth or fame or human institutions and creeds, or self or family, to any degree or extent.

Evidently the Lord saw that the Israelites were at this time ripe for a change; – that under the adversities inflicted through their enemies they were humbled to such an extent that they would be ready to see where was their fault, and to turn from idolatry again to the Lord. But the Lord wished an agent for his service, and instead of using a supernatural one – an angel – he chose, as usual, to use a man. And he chose, as usual, to use a suitable man, fit for the purpose. Gideon would seem to have been a man of middle age, for he had a son at this time of probably fifteen years of age; he was well born, as is implied by the record that he was fine of form and feature.

True, the adage is "handsome is, that handsome does"; it is true, too, that some who are handsome fail to measure up to their appearance in the conduct of life; nevertheless, it is beyond question that to those who can read character, the face and form, unless marred by accident, indicate the character and the training. The noble, the brave, the generous, the wise, by nature, by birth, show these qualities in feature and form; nevertheless God is not always able to use as his servants the naturally noblest and finest of the human family: too frequently with such nobility goes a spirit of pride and self-conceit, which renders the individual unsuited to the Lord's purposes of the present time, when humility and obedience to the Lord are the prime essentials. The Apostle noted this, saying that not many wise, not many noble, not many learned hath God chosen, but the weak things and the ignoble things – rich in faith, heirs of the Kingdom. (I Cor. 1:26.) How gracious

is this arrangement which opens the way to the highest divine favor for the humblest who hears the voice of the Lord and responds thereto with humility and zeal! Let the ignoble, then, who have tasted of the Lord's grace, be encouraged to trust that even though ignoble by nature the grace of the Lord is able to work in them such a transformation of character that they may in heart, at least, become copies of God's dear Son, and thus be prepared for the finishing touches of our promised "change" in the First Resurrection.

As Gideon's band may be considered a figure or illustration of the overcomers of this Gospel age, the Church, the little flock, – so Gideon himself would fitly represent the Captain of our salvation, whose example we are to follow, and whose character is to impress all his followers. Of Gideon it is declared that he looked like a king's son – that in appearance, form, etc., he had a nobility which marked him as above the ordinary rank and file. So our Lord Jesus is the King's Son, and so all whom he accepts to be of his little band, his little flock, are to be conformed to his image by the power of God working in them "to will [R3110 : page 348] and do of his good pleasure;" working in them through a knowledge of the truth; – the knowledge of the exceeding great and precious promises of God's Word. Whatever they are by nature, it is God's design that eventually they shall be like their Lord and Captain, see him as he is and share his glory, honor and immortality.

After receiving the Lord's invitation to be the deliverer of his people, Gideon also received a test: he was to hew down the trees constituting the grove of Baal and was to overthrow the statue and was to offer to the Lord sacrifices upon a rock, using the wood from Baal's grove and image as the fuel. Sure that he was following the Lord's command, he did not wait to gain even the consent of his father, much less that of his people in that vicinity who he knew would be greatly incensed by such a procedure. Assuring himself that his commands were of the Lord, he hesitated not one moment but accomplished the destruction and made the offering, doing the work by night knowing it

would be interrupted by the people if done in the day time. The citizens of his clan demanded his life, appealing the matter to his father who, evidently, was a chief amongst them; but the wise decision of the father was that if Baal could not defend himself against his son, there was certainly no need of any one taking up the cause of Baal.

Thus the Lord protected the one whom he had chosen for his servant and brought him more markedly than ever before the attention of the people, so that when he sent out invitations for volunteers from various quarters, an army of thirty-odd thousand assembled to his standard. Then came the sifting which is particularly noted in this lesson; (1) Gideon's army had a chance to see the hosts of the enemy, more than five times as numerous; (2) they had a chance to consider that their enemies were used to warfare while they as a people had for now a long time been accustomed to the peaceable pursuits of agriculture. When, therefore, Gideon requested that as many as felt fearful should withdraw, it depleted his army to the extent of two-thirds; yet many if not all of these who first volunteered but were now rejected, probably had an opportunity a little later on of joining in the battle after the Midianites had been discomfited and were in full retreat. But the ten thousand courageous men, fearless in the presence of an enemy many times their own strength, must have been men of faith in the Lord, men who, in some respects at least, resembled Gideon, in their hearts, in their courage, in their trust in Jehovah; nevertheless there were still too many for the Lord's purpose, and a thorough sifting was made by which the Lord separated three hundred of their number for his special service under Gideon.

The selection of Gideon's little flock reminds us of the selection of the Lord's spiritual people. Of these there is first a call to faith in the Lord, resulting in justification and acceptance; secondly, there is a call to consecration, in full view of the requirements, in full view of the enemy, and our Captain requests all of the justified ones who come to him to sit down first and count the cost, whether or not they are willing to sacrifice their all under his leadership. The large majority when they

come to see the cost, to realize the battle that must be waged between the followers of the Lord and the forces of the world, the flesh and the Devil, are rather inclined to say, We prefer not to engage in battle, we are timid, we are fearful, we have not sufficient confidence either in Gideon or Gideon's God. It is in accord with the Lord's will that such should be considered separate from God's army, though they may have subsequently an opportunity for joining in the battle against evil.

It is not sufficient that we should have faith in the Lord and in the Captain of our salvation and should make our consecration to the Lord's will; but further tests are made with the view to making a final selection of a very special class to constitute the little flock. It will be the test of water – symbolizing the truth; it becomes a very important question to every consecrated one as he is brought to a knowledge of the truth how he will receive it, – appropriate it: in the picture or type those accepted of God to be Gideon's little flock, used their hands to lift the water to their mouths, a sup at a time as a dog uses his tongue to lift the water; while the others drank like as a horse who puts his mouth into the water and sucks it. The hand is a symbol of energy and we might understand this to signify that the persons most approved of the Lord, will use energy and discretion in partaking of the truth – these will not bow down in the mire of human servility, but will maintain their own erectness of manhood and will partake of the water of truth, lifting their heads upward and acknowledging its heavenly origin by whatever stream or channel it may come to them.

The selection complete, the remainder of the brave men were not sent home but to Gideon's tent, or headquarters, there to be ready for their share in the battle later. Those whom God would specially use were supplied with peculiar implements; first a ram's horn; secondly, a pitcher; thirdly, a lamp, or torch, placed inside the pitcher and thus obscured from the view of their enemies. The three hundred were divided into three companies and the individuals of each company were scattered. They approached close to the enemy and practically surrounded their camp; when Gideon blew, all who heard the blast gave

similar blasts upon their trumpets; when Gideon broke his pitcher and let the light of his torch or firebrand gleam forth, the others did the same, blowing meantime with their trumpets and alternately shouting, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." It was the Lord's battle and the Lord's arrangement and it carried out as intended; the Midianites awakened from their slumbers, panic stricken, believed themselves surrounded by immense hosts, and fled precipitately, killing one another in their fright and confusion. Perceiving the routes they would take, Gideon hastened with his ten thousand followers to intercept them and to complete the defeat. Meanwhile others of the people, learning of the condition of things, joined in the battle to the ultimate and utter discomfiture [R3110 : page 349] of the Midianites, and the destruction of the vast majority of their hosts, including their leaders.

Our Captain, the Lord, has given special instructions to those whom he will specially use in the conflict of evil now in progress. Each one shall follow the example of the Captain of our salvation; first, he shall blow upon the trumpet representing the proclamation of the truth, and that the sword of the spirit of truth is of Jehovah and of his anointed Son, and secondly, they shall break their pitchers and let their light shine out. The pitchers represent our earthen vessels, and the breaking of them in order to let the light shine out signifies that to which we are exhorted by the Apostle; saying, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service." We see how our Chief-Captain broke his earthen vessel; we see what a light streamed forth. Our highest ambition must be to follow his example, to walk in his steps, to lay down our lives for the brethren as he laid down his life for us. Meantime the blowing of the trumpet is to progress and the shouting in the name of Jehovah, our Captain, and the sword of the spirit of truth is to be wielded; – the result will be victory; the enemies of the Lord will be overwhelmed.

But many others than the little flock will be associated in the work of overthrow, though theirs will be a special work as specially chosen

instruments of the Lord. Now is the time for response to the call of our Captain; now is the time for standing the tests and being full of faith and confidence in the Lord, that he is able to give us the victory. Now is the time for standing the test of truth, accepting it as from the Lord and lifting our hearts in gratitude. Now is the time for understanding the will of the Captain, following his example, and imitating him and laying down our lives for the brethren, and as sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God and our reasonable service. Now is the time for the proclamation and for publicly declaring our confidence in him who called us, who gave us the light and who has privileged us to be his little flock; and very shortly will come the time for the fleeing of the enemy. Let us be faithful to our tests and opportunities, and thus be accounted worthy of a share in the service and the glory that shall follow.

