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## **GIDEON – THE MAN OF COURAGE**

– *JANUARY 17.* – *JUDGES 6:11-40.* –

A LOGICAL MAN – A STRONG CHARACTER – TOO HUMBLE FOR SELF-CONFIDENCE – FAITH AFTER PROOF – HOSPITALITY REWARDED

– *DARING AND DOING FOR GOD* –

### **FAITH GROWING SEEKS FRESH PROOFS.**

**"Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest." – PSALM 65:4.**

ALTHOUGH the Scriptures tell us that not many great, rich, wise and strong are chosen of the Lord for His work, we may be sure that this is not because they would be unacceptable, but because their wisdom, riches, strength, courage, usually make them too self-confident and not sufficiently reliant on the Lord – not sufficiently humble to be taught of Him and to be glad of opportunities for His service. It was to Gideon, a stalwart young Israelite, that the angel of the Lord was sent with a message and with a work. His salutation was, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Gideon replied with excellent logic, "Why, if the Lord be with us, hath all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles of which our fathers told us?"

The Midianites and others of the nomadic peoples from the East, discerning that the land of Canaan was very fertile, repeatedly invaded it, confiscating much of the product of the land, so that on this very occasion Gideon was threshing out a few sheaves of wheat, fearing to have a customary threshing lest the Midianites should rob them of all their possessions and increase their levy.

The angel was not there to discuss theology, but to inspire Gideon and to make of him a messenger of the Lord in the deliverance of His people. The humility of the man shines out in his protest that his family was one of the poorer of the tribe of Manasseh, and that he himself was inferior to his brethren of his own father's house. Surely a mistake had been made in the selection, and a more capable person should be found! But to this the angel of the Lord replied, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

When we remember the Lord's promise to Israel that He would defend them and protect their interests – when we remember that their interests were earthly interests – then we should remember also that this protection was dependent upon Israel's maintenance of heart-loyalty and faithfulness to God. In the same Covenant the Lord assured the people in advance that if they would wander away into idolatry He would bring upon them various adversities – that their enemies should reap their harvests, etc. Thus we may know the answer to Gideon's question of why the Lord allowed the distress in which they were. It was not that God was unfaithful to His Covenant, but that the Israelites had been unfaithful.

A proof of this unfaithfulness is found in our lesson and its context. Gideon's father had the charge or was caretaker of the groves of Baal and Ashtaroath. Their images were near his home – apparently on his property. These groves were large posts, significant of honor, erected near the idol; and these were maintained by the people of Gideon's own time, his own father being one of the principal of them. Here was the secret of Israel's helplessness and subjection to the Midianites.

Although Gideon apparently did not surely know who was his visitor, nevertheless something in the conversation persuaded him that he had an honorable guest. He prepared him a feast, and

brought it to him. Instead of eating it the angel directed that the soup be poured out on a rock round about the food, and then touched the cakes and the lamb with his staff. A miracle followed which demonstrated that the visitor was the angel of the Lord – fire proceeded from the rock and entirely consumed the food, which thus was accepted as a sacrifice. Immediately the angel vanished from Gideon's sight; for he had accomplished the purpose of his mission.

## **THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS**

Here we have another illustration of the fact that we are surrounded by spirit beings, invisible to our natural eyes, and the fact also that in God's providence in olden times He communicated to mankind through these angels, of whom we read, "The angel of the Lord encampeth [R5606 : page 9] around about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." And again, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation?" Doubtless the angels of the Lord are as present with His people as ever – indeed more so during this Gospel Age since Pentecost than ever before, because now God's people are the Spirit-begotten ones specially precious in their Father's sight. – Psalm 34:7; Hebrews 1:14.

"Their angels do always have access to the Father," was the comment of the Lord Jesus respecting His followers. It is a part of their business to look after the interests of the consecrated members of the Body of Christ and to deliver them from everything that would not be for their advantage, in harmony with the assurance that "all things shall work together for good to those who love God." But it is the interest, the good, of the New Creature that is being considered and not the interests of the flesh. These messengers, no less powerful, are invisible throughout the Gospel Age because the Lord would have the members of the House of Sons walk by faith and not by sight. – 2 Corinthians 5:7.

In olden times, however, in the time of the House of Servants, the Lord's representatives assumed human bodies and ordinarily appeared in connection with their visits to humanity, so that they might have the better opportunity of direct conversation and instruction when communicating their messages. Thus the angels of the Lord appeared to Abraham and ate with him. He knew them not until subsequently they revealed their identity.

### **GIDEON'S GREAT COURAGE MANIFESTED**

The same night following the visit of the angel, the Lord made a further revelation to Gideon, instructing him to destroy the idols upon the property and to overthrow the altar of Baal and to build instead an altar to Jehovah, to kill one of his father's bullocks and therewith to make burnt offerings unto the Lord, using for the purpose the wooden pole, or "grove," which formerly did honor to Baal. The work was accomplished in the night because his father, his brethren and the men of the village would have stoutly resisted the work, had they known of it. Gideon, therefore, was very courageous when once he knew that he had been called of the Lord to do the work.

Indeed, we may say that conviction that our work is of Divine authority is a power of itself in the heart of any man or woman. This is part of the lack of today – lack of faith in God, and failure to recognize a mission that is of God. Much of the preaching, praying and good endeavors is, therefore, formalistic, "having a form of godliness without its power." From such we turn away, as St. Paul directed. We are seeking to be God's servants and we want surely to know the Divine Word. Armed with it, "one may chase a thousand."

A young Hebrew pursuing his course in Harvard University said, "I have a talent for music and am pursuing it; but, oh, I feel as though I want to find some great **[R5606 : page 10]** object worthy of my life and to give my life for that object!" Undoubtedly

there is such a sentiment in many of the young, especially between the years of twelve to twenty. Happy are the youth who, in God's providences, come under wise, helpful instruction, that they might realize that the grandest use of life possible is to render it to God in His service and in the service of humanity! Gideon was one of this type, as is manifest all through the story. He had the courage and the faith, and merely needed to have the knowledge of God and to be commissioned to go forth in His name to do His will.

When the villagers found what had happened and traced it to Gideon they called upon his father to deliver him up to death, but the latter wisely responded as to whether or not a god of mighty power would need to be defended. If Baal could not defend himself he could not defend Israel. The argument was potent. The people were prepared to look for a better God as their deliverer. Meantime, in harmony with his commission, while the Midianites were gathering, Gideon sent messengers to the various tribes, with the result that thirty thousand volunteers responded to give battle to the invaders.

But meantime, also, Gideon required fresh evidences of the Lord that he was doing the Divine will. The one test was that a wool fleece laid out in the open over night might be thoroughly wet with the dew, while the ground all about it might be dry. The Lord responded and granted the proof; for Gideon wrung from the fleece a bowl of water. But this was not enough. Who could tell but what there was some special attraction for the fleece in the water? He would reverse the test and ask God to grant a demonstration that all around the fleece might be perfectly wet with dew and that the fleece might be dry. This was also granted.

But we are not to think that because the Lord thus granted proofs to Gideon it would be proper for us today to make similar tests. We have much advantage every way. Behind us are the experiences of Gideon and others for now thousands of years –

added to which we have the New Testament records of God's favor toward mankind and the Lord Jesus. We have the "wonderful words of life" and an introduction to the Heavenly Father through the begetting of the Holy Spirit as a result of faith in the precious blood. Ours is a different case. The Lord would have us walk by faith in the lessons already taught us, and not by sights and signs of our own time.

