

Dealing with opposition to the Gospel - The example of Gideon

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Date: 19 November 2017

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[0 : 00] First one to be found in Deuteronomy chapter 4, beginning to read at verse 25, and then on to Judges chapter 6. Now this first reading is actually a background to everything that happens in the book of Judges, because it foretells a cycle of events which you find again and again and again in the book of Judges.

So Judges, Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 25. When you beget children and children's children and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a graven image in the form of anything and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you are going over the Jordan to possess.

You will not live long upon it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you.

And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of men's hands, that neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.

When you are in tribulation and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice. For the Lord your God is a merciful God.

[2 : 00] He will not fail you or destroy you, or forget the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them.

Then we turn to Judges chapter 6. And this particular narrative talks about how Gideon was inspired by faith to rise up against the men of Midian.

So we read briefly from verse 28. When the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut in two.

And the second bull was offered upon the altar which had been built. And they said to one another, Who has done this thing? And after they had made search and inquired, they said, Gideon, the son of Jewish, has done this thing.

Then the men of the town said to Jewish, Bring out your son, that he may die. For he has pulled down the altar of Baal, and cut down the Asherah beside it.

[3 : 17] But Jewish said to all who were arrayed against him, Will you contend for Baal, or will you defend his cause?

Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been pulled down.

Therefore on that day he was called Jeroboam. That is to say, let Baal contend against him, and he pulled down his altar.

Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together, and crossing the Jordan, they encamped in the valley of Zezeel.

But the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet. And the Abiazrites were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called to follow him.

[4 : 19] And he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet him. Amen. May the Lord bless those readings.

May they be to his praise and to his glory. I'm looking this morning at Judges 6, 33-34. Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together, and crossing the Jordan, they encamped in the valley of Zezeel.

But the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon. Now, when you read the book of Judges, you find that there are two in particular who get more than one chapter each.

The first of these is Gideon. He gets three chapters. And the second is Samson, who gets four chapters. Now, the sixth chapter begins with a statement.

The people of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. To put this into context historically, you think of Abraham.

[5 : 36] He's 2000 BC. Moses is 1600 BC. This is 1169. And this oppression lasted seven years to 1162 BC, after which there was a period of oppression for 40 years.

Now, as I've said already, when you read the book of Judges, you get these events occurring again and again and again. That was the point of reading Deuteronomy 4, because that chapter tells us that there would be four things happening.

The people would sin against the Lord. There would be an oppression by a foreign nation. There would be a time of prayer, and followed by a time of salvation.

So, this is happening again and again and again. I want to look at Gideon and see what he has to say about all this.

What he can say to us. How we can react to the growing secularity of our own generation. What is the answer? The Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon.

[6 : 59] Now, the background is this business that we noted at verse 1. The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. The Lord gave them into the hand of the Midianites.

Who were they? Like Israel, they were descended from Abraham. The book of Genesis tells us in chapter 25 that after the death of Sarah, Abraham took another wife whose name was Keturah, and she bore him Midian.

That's where they came from. In this time, they dwelt on both sides of the Red Sea, which you'll find in a modern atlas as the Gulf of Aqaba.

And the Midianites oppressed Israel by attacking them once a year. That was at the harvest time, so that they could rob Israel of the crops that they had grown.

Now, what was happening? They did evil in the sight of the Lord. So what was it that they did?

[8 : 13] What was the problem that was causing all this recession in the spiritual status of Israel? There's an unnamed prophet, early named in chapter 6, and he says this, I said to you, I am the Lord your God.

You shall not pay reverence to the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell, but you have not given heed to my voice.

In other words, they had broken the first commandment. And the first commandment is this, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods before me. They're living in the north of Israel in the tribal portion of Issachar.

And here it is that they'd broken this first commandment by worshipping the gods of the Amorites. Now, let us be clear what's happening here.

[9 : 24] This hasn't happened all of a sudden. It's happened gradually. And it started happening gradually when God told the people, do not have anything to do with the Amorites.

But one by one, these commandments were being set aside. What can we learn from this? we can learn that if we want to see spiritual prosperity, and I trust we do, we have to honour what God tells us and not surrender them in any way or relax them in any way.

Judges 6.6 Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the people of Israel cried to the Lord.

So in the midst of this oppression, what is happening is that they start to pray. What a wonderful thing that is. How many situations personally, globally, nationally have been affected by prayer.

So they pray. And what happens is, the first thing that happens is there is a personal revelation to Gideon.

[10 : 54] Has God appeared to you? Has he said something? The angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak at Opera, which belonged to Jewish, that's the father of Gideon, and as his son was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

And what this personal revelation does is to say to Gideon, this is what you're going to be. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, verse 12, the Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor.

God, but when you read the text, you find that that's not what Gideon is. In fact, he's afraid of the people of the town and his own family, and he acts in secret.

He's acting in secret now, when he's reaping this harvest, so as not to be seen by the Midianites. but the Lord said to him, the Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor.

And that's the basis of things beginning to change. And God knows we need a change in this country. And the change comes by the coming of the Spirit.

[12 : 25] The Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiasrites were called out to follow him.

The coming of the Spirit of God. And what the text says is, the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon.

But that's actually more of a paraphrase than it is a direct translation. Because the Hebrew language uses a verb, labash, which means to close, and contains the same idea as someone putting on a suit of clothes in the morning.

That's what it means. The Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon. Now, one of the things you find when you read the Old Testament is this.

The Holy Spirit, unlike today, did not dwell in people, but on people for a specific purpose.

[13 : 46] And there's a wonderful chapter in Numbers chapter 11 that breaks this clear. what's happening here is that the burden which Moses is given is being translated and transferred to 70 elders.

And this happens at the tabernacle outside the camp. But in the camp, there are two people called Eldad and Medad.

When the Spirit of God rested on the 70 elders, it also rested on them, and they began to prophesy. And so Joshua, he says, my Lord Moses, forbid them.

And he says this, are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and the Lord would place his spirit upon them.

God Now, here is a very preachable text. I haven't preached on it yet, but nevertheless, there's always hope. Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and the Lord would place his spirit upon them.

[15 : 05] Now, let us be clear what is happening in the New Testament setting. In the New Testament setting, the Holy Spirit dwells in each and every one of us.

It's defined in Colossians as Christ in you, the hope of glory. Writing to the Corinthians, Mark U, in chapter 6 of the first letter, he says, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now, the word that he's used here, and please don't be bored with me quoting Hebrew and Greek because it's part of the illustration of what's happening. The word that's used here, neos, doesn't mean the precincts of the temple, it means the Holy of Holies.

That means that in each and every one of us, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you in the same way that God dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the ancient tabernacle and temple.

Now, if that is the case, let me suggest to you that the power latent in this congregation is sufficient to meet the needs of the hour and bring blessing to you, to your families, and the people surrounding this church.

[16 : 35] The Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon. Now, the angel of the Lord had declared to him, go in this mighty of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian.

Do not I send you. So, hear what's happening. Gideon is not anymore this fearful person.

The promise of God is there, prefaced by the challenge. Go in this mighty of yours and deliver Israel. And the promise is this, I will be with you and you will smite the Midianites as one man.

God's promise and God's challenge. In 1 Kings 18, in the ministry of Elijah, he challenges the people as to their continued worship of Baal.

And he says this, Elijah came near to all the people saying, how long will you go on limping with two different opinions?

[17 : 46] If the Lord is God, follow him, but is Baal, then follow him. Now, this way of expressing itself, of limping between two opinions, is the Old Testament way of saying, you people are sitting on the fence.

You won't decide. You want to worship the Lord, but you also want to worship Baal. And the result is that he challenges the prophets of Baal and says that the God that answers by fire, he is the real God.

And we read further on in the chapter that the fire of the law fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

Then the people cried out, the Lord, he is the God. So this was being done in the face of severe opposition, being obedient to the challenge.

We have the promise. We have the challenge. That's what this chapter is all about, challenging Gideon to do something.

[19 : 07] Thirdly, the fruit. then of the spirit's coming. Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of East came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the valley of Zezeel.

The spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abias were called out to follow him.

So the spirit of the Lord comes upon Gideon. What is it that he does first of all? And the first thing that he does is to restore the worship of the true God.

He built an altar at this place, Ophra, Judges 6, 22, 24. Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it the Lord is peace.

It still stands at Ophra, which belongs at the Abbey Azrites. Now this is the basis of something happening.

[20 : 26] It's the business of personal worship. it's the business of restoring the true worship of God.

It's from this that all his successive actions follow. It's from this that his triumph in battle is followed.

Then we find that following that he destroys pagan worship. that night the Lord said to him, take your father's bull, the second bull, seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal, which your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it.

Now this Baal was actually worshipped originally in Phoenicia, and he was a god, supposedly, that controlled the weather. And what is happening here is that the Lord's worship is to be restored in the very place where Baal had been worshipped.

Verse 26, Build an altar to the Lord your God on top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order, then take the second bull and offer it as an offering with the wood of the Asherah, which you shall cut.

[21 : 57] down. So this Gideon does at night. He destroys the pagan worship because it's of no consequence whatsoever.

It's a delusion. And following that, the beginning of the ending of this oppression which had lasted seven years was to happen.

So we read, following this destruction, when the men of the town rose early in the morning, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered upon the altar which had been built.

now, what happens next? What happens next is that the opposition is rallied against Israel.

Verse 33, Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the valley of Zezeel.

[23 : 09] So what's the answer to it? What's the answer to this continual opposition? The answer is the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon and he acts. He sounds the trumpet for war.

Now, there's a sequence of events here which we have to follow. The first event is the revelation of the angel of the Lord, or the Lord himself, to Gideon.

The second event is the restoration of the true worship of the Lord at the place at which the angel of the Lord had originally revealed himself to Gideon.

The third event is the destruction of pagan worship at personal cost and sacrifice to himself. And it is then the Lord pours out his Spirit on Gideon.

[24 : 24] what can we do about the forces that gather themselves against the Christian gospel?

We follow what Gideon practiced and what he practiced effectively was an altar of worship in his home.

having a month a daily altar of worship in your home will bring success, will bring blessing, and will bring deliverance because at that altar of worship you can pray and you can pray for all those in your family that do not know the Lord that the Lord indeed will effect upon them a work of grace which will turn their hearts and minds to seek the Lord.

Yes, and it happens. So, what can we say in conclusion? In conclusion, we can all, each and every one of us, be a Gideon for God.

We can follow his actions. We can seek the Lord. We can restore worship. We can pray. Listen to the Hebrews that speaks of him like this.

[25 : 59] In the great chapter of faith, the heroes of faith, chapter 11, he comes to verse 32, which is the beginning of his summing up.

What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David, and Samuel and the prophets, who, through faith, conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

All of this achieved by faith. faith. And when we look at this chapter, it might appear that Gideon to start with did not have much faith.

But the Lord appeared to him and extended his vision in which he could see what God could do through him.

Can you see what God can do through you? Take this chapter, build your life upon it, and let's see the blessing and the deliverance which the Lord will grant.

[27 : 48] Amen. Amen. Charles Wesley, whose hymn we're about to sing, Susan's going to play the tune through once, just to make sure you know it, then a short introduction and we'll sing it.

But in his day, the national church was dead. God got a hold of him and he changed the situation so that we can now rejoice in the words that he sung, thou who camest from above.

Amen. for this that we our other prays or take to my God Hoor-go form thy glorified, My waking does generous■ly, And William to ASU.

Through Bronze w u■y d et oile. In long of great and peril.

We are the well, our God's desire, to come and sing and live for me.

[29 : 58] To every God of the Holy Spirit, our sins will come like in me.

We are the well, our God's desire, to come and sing and sing and sing.

Let's pray. Our God and Father, we are impressed with what you did through your servant Gideon.

And we are encouraged to believe that you can do the self-same thing through us. So as we have considered your word this morning, we pray that it might dwell in our hearts and bring forth its own fruit.

And we ask that the blessing of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, might remain upon us this day and always.

[31 : 28] Amen.