

## ....Evil in the Sight of the Lord

<<< *Judges 6:1 – 35*

~ We'll meet another judge in this report from our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God; one that most Christians are vaguely familiar with. In our next report, we'll see how God used this man mightily. Gideon is certainly one of the most, if not the most, interesting judge in the Book of Judges. However, Gideon is NOT the outstanding judge of Scripture, to be sure; Deborah would receive my vote as most outstanding judge and her song, which we sang in our last report, certainly was remarkable. That said, I personally don't consider ANY of the judges truly "outstanding" on any level – as each had some glaring fault and quirky characteristic that made them unusual or odd.

Outstanding just isn't a word I would associate with any of the judges we have record of in Israel. The common thread amongst the men, and one woman, raised up by God as judges during this period in which we are studying is one marked by mediocrity; they were oddballs, too – and each had some glaring fault that takes "outstanding" off the table as an adjective for any of them. They were all insufficient, inadequate, and each was abhorrent in one way or another in their life and in the method in which they came to judge Israel.

We met the first judge, Othniel, who only became a judge through nepotism - being related to Caleb. We then met Ehud; whose only attribute we know of was being left-handed. Shamgar was barely mentioned as he went around killing with his ox goad. That was an up-close and personal type of slaying, by the way. The last judge we considered was Deborah, a woman; and women just were not supposed to be in the position of judge as she was. Too bad there had been no man to take her place. That's our judgeship lineage thus far. Here, Gideon will be the judge who delivers the children of Israel from Midian – and that rhymes – so that could be his only qualifier because, as we shall see, a "mighty man of valor" is all we are told - and he certainly was NOT that....

VI

***1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.***

***2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.***

~ So, the children of Israel had abandoned the beautiful fields and forests of their land and fled to the mountains to become cavemen; and there is an abundance of historical evidence in the land of Israel that this occurred. We know many of them did live in caves during this particular time. We see the same song and dance again we have seen before in our safari philosophy of history. Israel had sinned – AGAIN – and now the “hoop of history” is spinning a hundred miles per hour. So, God delivers them into the hands of the Midianites, and Israel cries out again for deliverance....

***3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;***

***4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.***

***5 For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.***

***6 And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.***

***7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,***

***8 That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;***

***9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;***

***10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.***

***11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.***

~ Well, Gideon is not introduced as a hero but, rather as a coward. See, “threshing wheat by the winepress” is noteworthy, because the threshing floor, in that day, would have been at the highest place on the top of a hill. Grain was pitched into the air and the wind would carry away the chaff. The good grain would fall on the threshing floor. The winepress was always located down in the valley at the bottom of the hill, because hauling the grapes up a hill for no reason doesn’t make any sense. It’s a whole lot easier to push a heavy wheelbarrow full of grapes down a hill than push it up, of course. What we see here is Gideon hiding down in the valley because he didn’t want to be seen.

If Gideon had been at the top of a hill, the Midianites would have seen him and robbed him. Israel had a good crop of grain coming along and the Midianites needed it for their food stuff and their animals. The Midianites had no qualms taking what they needed. The problem is: there’s no wind blowing down in the valley, so threshing would have been a deeply frustrating job. I can just see Gideon flailing the wheat up into the air and, instead of the chaff blowing away, it all just comes down on his head and neck; and if you know anything about that, it is miserable to work in that condition. Well, God is gracious and good, so a prophet is sent to tell them why these things had befallen them. When they hear the prophet and cry

out for mercy, Gideon is raised as a judge and sent to deliver God's chosen people....

***12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.***

~ God has a great sense of humor. I like to use humor; even though there is a danger of becoming irreverent. The Word of God is a serious book that deals with a fallen race totally engrossed in sin. The Bible reveals God as high, holy and lifted up, to be sure. However, if we miss the humor God uses, then we are not going to find the Bible very interesting. There happens to be a whole lot of funny in the Bible. I have to laugh seeing Gideon hiding out and trying to do an impossible job all covered in chaff. Then, when the Angel of the Lord – Who we know is the pre-incarnate Christ – appears, He says, “thou mighty man of valor!” Well, Gideon undoubtedly looked around to see who in the world the Angel could be speaking to.

When Jesus was here on earth He had an awesome sense of humor. Remember, Jesus told the Pharisees they strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel; and if you don't think that's funny, maybe you never looked closely at a camel. A camel has more protrusions than a satellite in orbit. Camels even have horns, which many are not aware of. If we don't have a sense of humor, we'll never recognize God has a sense of humor. Here, we have the Lord calling this coward, Gideon, a mighty man of valor. Of course, this was done for encouragement, but the title does not fit by any means....

***13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.***

~ The Lord said He was with “THEE” – not “us” – meaning He was not with them. The Lord was not with the nation Israel at this time because they were in apostasy – but the Lord was with Gideon. Notice how pessimistic – and just wrong – Gideon is when he asks, “.... if the Lord be with us, then why has this befallen us?” Gideon thinks the Lord has forsaken Israel; but,

in reality, the nation Israel has forsaken God. Gideon wonders where all those miracles were that he knew had happened before. Seriously, how many so-called Christians are in exactly this same condition today? This is where we see God call and commission Gideon. Obviously, he had one tremendous inferiority complex. Gideon is skeptical and cynical; he is weak and confused. Gideon is not in a position to believe God could possibly use him. Gideon is the least man in a peasant family in a tribe of one of the sons of Joseph. Gideon honestly felt he would be the last person to be chosen by God; and he was correct.

The problem with most of us today is that we are too strong to be used by God. Most of us are too capable to allow the Lord to work through us. You may have noticed God ONLY uses weak vessels. God Himself says that. Paul said, "... not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." See, God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound those who deign profess themselves wise. God has chosen the weak things of the world to frustrate the self-declared mighty man. God says the wisdom of this world is foolishness to Him; that the base things of the world and that which is despised hath He chosen; that which is not has brought to pass that which is.

We should put in an A-Men right here. God does it that way so that no flesh will attempt to glory in His presence. Any Christian worker who is proud of their Christian service is defective – there is something radically wrong with them – they are NOT being used by God for the cause of Christ - you can just write that down; I don't care if they win beauty contests and build churches and feed every orphan in the world. Friends, let's get this straight: God does NOT use the flesh - for anything - under any circumstances - EVER. Any act any of us performs in the weakness of our flesh and boasts about it – may I say – God Hates and despises that worker of iniquity - Psalm five. This is where things get real, my beloved.

God is in the business of using weak vessels. Further, He only uses the failures and shortcomings of those vessels for His glory. God will not use our strengths and abilities to further the cause of Christ. These are terribly bitter pills to swallow. This is where most people part ways with Jesus. Remember, Moses told God he was very capable to deliver Israel in the

beginning. Moses went out and slew the Egyptian beating the Israelite slave to prove a point. Moses honestly thought he was capable at that time. Well, that episode earned Moses forty years on the backside of the desert of Midian until God was able to change Moses' mind. THEN, God told Moses he was ready for service. That's when Moses said, "... I'm not sure I'm qualified, Lord."

Elijah is always thought of as being such a strong and courageous character when he back-talked old man Ahab and Jezebel. Well, the next scene in Elijah's life is Elijah by a little brook begging for God to take his life. I seriously doubt Elijah felt qualified to stand for God again in front of those two abhorrent rulers. Elijah found out his life was just a withering little stream that would soon be completely dried up. Only when Elijah accepted God feeding him from an empty flour barrel did Elijah sing the doxology. This is so important to learn and understand, my beloved. I cannot stress the importance of this truth in our contemporary lives. How are you doing with esteeming others better than yourself and considering the welfare of others above your own?

Alright, quirky men and women being used by God is the common theme we discover in each account of the judges of the nation Israel. Not a single judge is capable or outstanding; they're all obscure and peculiar. Simon Peter said, "... depart from me, Lord, for I am not worthy." That was the first time Simon Peter was correct. Peter had failed Jesus so many times he couldn't take the stress any longer. Only when Simon Peter told Jesus to go get someone else who could be depended on did Jesus commission Peter.

A baby from the bulrushes of Egypt and a baby in a manger in Bethlehem that was being hidden from Cesar Augustus – not to mention Saul of Tarsus – are the types of men we have being used mightily in the Bible. If God is going to use you, then you will be brought to the place where you realize you are absolutely nothing. Make a note of that if you think Christian service is desired in your life. It certainly appeared that Paul had lost when Nero was on the throne and Paul was being executed in a dank and dark Roman prison; but, interestingly, many people name their sons "Paul" today – whereas "Nero" is what we name our dogs.

History has handed down its decision. Gideon is an obvious weakling when God says to him, "you're the one!" That should be a real encouragement to you – it sure is to me. If you view yourself as someone God couldn't possibly use; then YOU are the one He is calling to His service. Then - and only then - will the Lord train you for effective use in glorifying His Son. God will help overcome fears and God will develop faith – IF we will allow Him to. Only God can bring strength to the feeble knee! Likewise, only God can bring the patience required to do the work of the Lord; and you can trust me – it takes tremendous patience to work for God. That little reality is what keeps just about everyone on the sidelines when they ought to be out there on the field doing something for Him....

***14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?***

***15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.***

***16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.***

***17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.***

***18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.***

***19 And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.***

***20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.***

***21 Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.***

***22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.***

***23 And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.***

***24 Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.***

***25 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:***

***26 And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.***

***27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.***

***28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.***

***29 And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.***



**30 Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it.**

**31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.**

**32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.**

**33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.**

**34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him.**

**35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.**

~ Gideon may be obeying the Lord, but he is still a coward. No one knew who did this thing and, when they found out, they were about to skin Gideon alive! When God calls you, He is going to test you, and He is going to test your endurance and patience, believe me. Interestingly, that's the moment – if you trust Him – that you will realize deliverance.

Well, the minute Gideon did all of this, he got cold feet – AGAIN. Gideon is at his breaking point; and he's ready to back out and tell God to forget the whole deliverance thing. Some people find it much easier to remain a victim of the Midianites, spiritually speaking. It happens ALL the time. Turn that over in your mind a few times and see how it might apply to you.

To further strengthen Gideon, God is going to establish the first dew line in recorded history. America has a dew line in the north; and here is one in

Israel! We're going to examine fleece in the next leg of our safari. First, Gideon puts out the fleece and there's to be dew on it; well, that won't be good enough so, the next night, there's NOT to be any dew on it. Yes, friends, Gideon is having a nervous breakdown. Nothing God does is satisfactory to this man at this time. Well, God will play along and pass Gideon's test. God is patient and gracious to Gideon; and we're all set for him to deliver his nation from deep oppression. I hope this is as thrilling for you to read as it is for me to write and realize.

God didn't give Gideon a crash course in Christianity; it was a gradual process the Lord was gentle and caring enough to establish in a life. God is carrying Gideon to the place where it can be seen by Gideon that there is no redeeming quality in Gideon. That's the only time God even considers using Gideon to win in battle. Our problem today is that most of us are too strong to be used by God. Most of us have too much talent. Well, if talent was used by God to bring revival, this world would be converted tonight! The church is over-loaded with talent; what they lack is the backing of the power of God. They're too strong – too good – too perfect – too smart, sophisticated and intellectually gifted to be of any useful service. We need to come back to the Book of Judges and get our minds together ~

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