Gideon’s Army

Intro: As our basis for our study turn to Judges 6-7. Before we look at this there are some background information we need to consider.

1. It had been forty years since the defeat of Jabin (Jud. 4:24 “And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.”; Jud. 5:31 “So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.”).

2. The Israelites had already been in bondage three times and one would think that they had learned their lesson and should know the peril of evil and unfaithfulness to God.
   a. How soon men forget that without God they are weak.
   b. We are never far enough away from evil not to slip back into it: unless we keep striving and growing.
      i. 1 Cor. 10:12 “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”
      ii. 2 Pet. 1:10 “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:”

3. Israel became prosperous and the business of living and making a living absorbed all their time and effort. When labor in the fields is done other task are found to be engaged in until they have no time left for God.
   a. Neither a man nor a congregation can be truly religious that is not missionary in spirit. Worship dies and faith withers unless we accept the tasks that belong to us as Christians.
   b. When Israel lost sight of its mission, it felt no need of faith and with the loss of faith they lost their strength.
   c. Without a sense of common purpose, they lacked unity to resist their enemies and were overcome. Unity depends upon purity of faith.

I. The Means Of Bringing Failure Home To Them.
   A. It is always on hand.
      1. If a man neglects his fields, nature will remind him of his neglect: weeds will take over and his crops will be ruined.
      2. If a man neglects his business, his creditors will take his business.
   B. Israel
      1. Did they think that work in the fields and harvesting was their chief concern?
      2. If so, they had been deceived.
   C. Man today
      1. Do we think that material things are the chief aim of life?
      2. If so, then we have been deceived.
      3. Must our privileges be taken away before we are made to realize that God and faithfulness to Him must come first in our lives.
         a. Mat. 6:33 “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
         b. Luke 9:23 “And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”
D. Our Nation
1. Do we not, in our nation, think about material matters?
   a. stock market
   b. recessions, and inflation
   c. business news, taxes, pollution, etc.
2. What about the moral evils that affect this nation?
   a. Failing marriages
   b. Abortion
   c. Homosexuality
   d. Moral corruption in government
   e. Crime, etc.
3. How concerned are we about the moral corruption that is in this nation? Are we concerned enough to do something about it?

II. Israel Cries Unto Jehovah
A. Jud. 6:6 “And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.”
B. Israel had been brought low, impoverished; now they will think about God.
   1. It is necessary for many to be brought low before we will recognize our need of God.
   2. The first answer by God was the message of a prophet.
      a. Prior to this time a prophet would have been despised by the Israelites in their self-sufficient mood.
      b. Now, after being humbled, they are ready to hear, and listen to the prophet.
   3. Many a preacher has experienced being sent for by some who are in difficulty that prior to that difficulty would never have thought of a preacher.

III. Gideon’s Call
A. Gideon is visited by an angel.
   1. Jud. 6:11-18 “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. 12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. 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. 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, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me. 16 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.”
   2. Through this he was able to get a vision of God and then to duty.
      a. These two always go together.
      b. The man that has no sense of responsibility has no proper vision of God, for when we have a vision of God we will have a sense of responsibility.
      c. Isa. 6:1-8 “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth

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is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

B. Gideon tore down his father’s altar to Baal.

1. Jud. 6:25 “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.”

2. The proper place to begin is always at home.

C. Gideon builds an altar to God.

1. Jud. 6:26 “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.”

2. He did not just tear down and leave empty—He put the right thing in its place.
   a. There is a place, need, for both negative and positive.
   b. Some would have tried to tear down the altar to Baal and put nothing in its place; some would try to build the altar of God by the side of the altar to Baal.
   c. Neither of these would be successful.

D. Gideon is first sent to recover Israel’s lost ideals and restore their distinctiveness. Without their ideals and recognition of the principles of their distinctiveness there can be no hope for Israel.

E. Gideon’s Army; Judges 7.

1. Gideon started with 32,000 soldiers, but God said this was too many.
   a. The Battle was God’s and the victory for winning was also God’s.
   b. God wanted Israel to realize that they had not saved themselves; Jud. 7:2 “And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.”
   c. The church needs to realize that the battle is God’s and the honor for the victory over sin and Satan is to be His.
      (1) Too many times we forget this and rely on our own strength instead of God’s.
      (2) Too many times we claim honor for ourselves that should be given to God.
      (3) This sometimes causes us to refuse to enter into battles because we face them in our own strength and forget about the promises of God.

2. The faint-hearted were rejected.
   a. Jud. 7:3 “Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.”
   b. 22,000 were too faint-hearted to face the battle.
   c. The battle against sin is no place for the faint-hearted.
      (1) 1 Cor. 16:13 “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”
      (2) 2 Tim. 2:1 “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

3. The Water Test.
   a. Jud. 7:4-7 “And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This
shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6 And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 7 And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.”

b. Water was needful, but the way in which they drank it showed their spirit.
   (1) This was no haphazard test: there is wisdom in it.
   (2) The 300 knew what their mission was.
   (3) They get a drink and are on their way, while the others are by the stream drinking.

c. Many commonplace things test the quality of men.
   (1) Every day we are led to the stream to drink to show what we are and whether we are in earnest about divine things.
   (2) We show our spiritual state by our attitude and actions.
      (a) What do we do with our time?
      (b) What about our concern for the church and its activities?
      (c) What about Bible study on Sunday morning and Wednesday night, and Sunday afternoon services.
      (d) These are like Israel’s water test, they show our spiritual state. How many fail this test?
   (3) Do we pile up engagement after engagement until we spend all our time at the stream and forget the battle?

d. Israel had 10,700 tagging along in the army without any sense of duty as soldiers.
   (1) What are we?
   (2) Are we taggers-along or are we soldiers?

4. The 300 Soldiers; Jud. 7:7-8:4.
   a. They were selected men.
      (1) 2 Tim. 2:2 “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”
      (2) The Bible makes unusual people out of ordinary people.
   b. They had faith in the cause they were fighting for.
      (1) They were willing to stake their lives on it.
      (2) That is what religion is all about: If it is not worth staking our lives on, then it is not worth anything.
   c. They made the fullest use of their means and left the results to God.
      (1) Think of what the church could do today if we really used what we have and left the rest up to God.
      (2) 1 Cor. 3:6 “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.”
   d. Every man stood in his place.
      (1) Jud. 7:21 “And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.”
      (2) There were no idle men in Gideon’s army.
         (a) There were no soldiers standing on the sidelines.
         (b) Each man stood as though the outcome of the battle depended completely on him and what he did.
Think of what the church could do if every soldier (Christian) stood in his place.

e. They acted in unity.
   (1) Every soldier was at his place and every man had a pitcher with a light in it and a trumpet. At the signal every man blew his trumpet and broke the pitcher to let the light shine.
   (a) Just suppose that when the signal was given one man jumped up blew his trumpet and broke his pitcher, after a while another would do so, then another, etc.
   (b) There would have been no victory for Israel that day.

   (2) But what about in the church?
   (a) Do we act in unity, working together?
   (b) Do we allow one person to blow his trumpet, break his pitcher, let his light shine all alone, until he becomes discouraged?

f. Just Suppose:
   (1) It was time for the battle and half of the army cannot be found. Gideon has to get out and round them up.
      (a) There would not have been a victory for Gideon and his army.
      (b) Is that not what happens in the church?
         (i) We ought to be out fighting the enemy (sin and evil).
         (ii) Instead we have to spend time rounding up those who claim to be Christians.
   (2) One had put water in his pitcher instead of a light, and went around pouring water on the other soldiers light.
      (a) They would have been fighting against Israel instead of Midian.
      (b) Again there would not be a victory.
      (c) We see this many times in the church.
         (i) Christians fighting against Christians; Gal. 5:15 “15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”
         (ii) Christians pouring water on others light.
   (3) What if each of Gideon's men had said, “Well I don't believe I can make it today,” and tried to let the other fellow take care of the battle.
      (a) Gideon and his army would have lost the battle.
      (b) Is this not what happens in the church?
         (i) Let someone else do it
         (ii) Often use the excuse that someone else can do it so much better.
      (c) Is this not why we fail to win more battles for Christ than we do: because we fail to show up to do the work.
   (4) What if half of Gideon's army had decided to visit that day or night. They wanted to visit another army and left their post vacant.
      (a) Again the victory would have gone to Midian.
      (b) Yet, do we not see this in the church.

   g. The Midanites were wrong.
      (1) As a result they were weak.
      (2) Wrong is never strong, it might appear to be but it is not.
      (3) Any victory that evil might gain will be short lived.
Conclusion: The simple lessons of Gideon and his army when applied to the church will bring victories over evil. Gideon and his men did not quit until the job was finished (Jud. 8:4 “And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them.”). This is the attitude we need today (1 Cor. 15:58 “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”).

Conclusion: Encouragement! This is one of the great lessons we learn from Gideon and his army. When they did that which was right, God was with them. When we are with God, God will be with us. Heb. 13:5-6 “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” Rom. 8:31 “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” What greater encouragement could we ask for: than to know that God is on our side. Gideon and his army is a beautiful example of the success and victory that is ours when we are Christians.