

Called

Judges 6:1-4, 7-16

FIRST THOUGHTS

We often compare ourselves to others. This rarely has a positive result. It either leads to pride because we think we are better than others, or it leads to discouragement because we believe others are better than us. It is especially confounding when God calls a person to serve Him in some capacity when someone else seems better fit to do it. God does this so that when the task is accomplished, God will receive the glory for it. Such was the case with Gideon.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The period between Joshua's death and the establishment of Israel's monarchy was tumultuous. "Everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25), which often meant worshiping the false gods of their pagan enemies instead of the one, true God who led them through the wilderness and into the promised land. So, for approximately three hundred years (1350–1050 BC), God's people experienced a continual cycle of rebellion, retribution, remorse, and restoration. Rather than dominating their enemies, Israelites' enemies dominated them because of their sin and rebellion.

To fill the leadership void during that period, God raised up a series of judges. While we tend to think of judges in legal contexts, these figures filled political and military capacities. On the surface, they seemed rather ordinary. Yet, they were faithful when God called them, which meant more than their expertise or background. They weren't perfect. In fact, some of them made serious mistakes along the way. Still, despite those flaws, God used them to deliver His people and bring Him glory.

KEY DOCTRINE *God The Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. (See Judges 14:6; Acts 1:8.)

OPPRESSION (JUDGES 6:1-4, 7-10)

After Deborah's death, God's people again ***did what was evil in the sight of the Lord*** (Judg. 3:7,12; 4:1). As a result, the forty years of rest they had enjoyed also came to an end (see 5:31). This new round of sin triggered new judgments from the Lord. As a result of the Israelites' transgressions, God ***handed them***

over to Midian for a period of ***seven years***.

The Midianites, along with ***the Amalekites*** and other ***people of the east***, proved to be an opportunistic foe. They targeted their attacks around Israel's agricultural calendar. The Bible says ***they encamped against*** Israel. The Hebrew word for ***encamped*** implies they pitched their tents on Israel's soil and laid siege. They focused on Israel's crops and ***destroyed the produce of the land***. Their path of destruction ***left nothing for Israel to eat***. Each attack from Midian and its allies left the Israelites destitute and in poverty.

When ***the Israelites cried*** to God, He responded by sending an unnamed ***prophet***. Similar to John the Baptist, this prophet served as a forerunner to prepare the people for the next leader the Lord would send. His message began with a reminder of past deliverance, specifically how God rescued them ***out of Egypt and out of the place of slavery***. The One who delivered them from the mighty Egyptians could—and would—deliver them from the Midianites. The prophet's message did not overlook the present disobedience because God was not overlooking that disobedience. Although He warned them not to ***fear the gods*** of their pagan enemies, they ***did not obey*** Him. It wasn't that the enemy was so strong, but that God's people were so disobedient.

COMMISSION (JUDGES 6:11-14)

Following the appearance of the unnamed prophet, ***the angel of the Lord*** returned (2:1–6; 5:23). This time, the angel ***sat under the oak that was in Ophrah***. The angel appeared to ***Gideon***, who was ***threshing wheat in the***

winepress. This shows just how desperate the situation had become in Israel. Normally, *threshing* grain was done outdoors on a high spot so the wind could blow away the chaff. But to **hide** this wheat from the Midianites, Gideon was working below ground in a sunken winepress—a less than ideal spot.

As if a heavenly being was not shocking enough, the angel's message surprised Gideon. The message had two parts. First, the angel said that **the Lord is with you**. In his current state of desperation, standing in a winepress, it was hard for Gideon to believe that God was with him. Likewise, seeing what Midian was doing to Israel, it would have been easier to think that God had forsaken His people.

Second, the angel called Gideon a **valiant warrior**. Again, Gideon was hiding from the enemy. Instead of being a man of war, he was a man of the soil. As his response will indicate, Gideon had trouble embracing any part of the angel's greeting. Yet, God saw something in Gideon that Gideon had not yet seen in himself.

Gideon demonstrated honesty and transparency in response: **Why has all this happened?** He could not reconcile the idea that God was with him and the other Israelites because of the suffering around him. Of course, God already had identified the root cause of the problem, but Gideon wasn't seeing that in the moment. In time, he would learn to trust God and the power of His Spirit. He would discover that he could **go in the strength** of God, which is beyond anything humans can imagine. But that would come later in the journey. In the winepress, he was just at the beginning, and things looked dark and discouraging.

The angel's specific command was to **deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian**. If Gideon wondered "how long," God answered "right now." He was going to resolve the very problem Gideon had identified. What's more, He was going to use Gideon to do it: **I am sending you!** God was sending a new judge to deliver His people.

REASSURANCE (JUDGES 6:15-16)

Even in the wake of this supernatural call, Gideon had his doubts. Even his address to the angel—**Please, Lord**—carries a hint of cynicism in Hebrew. That was followed quickly by a question that expressed his ongoing feelings of inadequacy: **How can I deliver Israel?**

To reinforce the point, Gideon presented what he thought were valid objections to God's plan. For starters, he stated that his family was **the weakest in Manasseh**. In other words, his clan had no social standing or influence within the larger tribe. While this first contention could have been a matter of opinion, Gideon's second point could not be argued: He was **the youngest in my father's family**. In a household suffering from a general lack of position or prestige, Gideon ranked at the end of the family tree. In his mind, he already had two strikes against him before the game even began.

Gideon had offered God two reasons for why he was not the right man for this job. In response, the Lord gave Gideon two airtight reasons why he could pull off something that seemed impossible. First, the Lord countered Gideon's doubts with an expression of comfort: **I will be with you**. What sweeter words of assurance could Gideon have heard than to know that the God who called him also would guide him every step of the way (Judg. 6:34).

Second, God emphasized how the mission would be accomplished. Instead of softening His stance, the Lord refused to stray from the primary task: **You will strike Midian down as if it were one man**. In this, God hinted that Gideon would not be fighting a defensive battle. With the Lord's help, he would be the aggressor, going on the offensive against a powerful foe. God won't call us into service without equipping us for the task. The key is not what we are capable of doing for Him, but what He is able to do through us.

Next Week – Trust, Judges 7:1-8, 19-23

