

Gideon, A Great Deliverer

(Judges 6-8)

by

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Would you like to hear a true story about a man who won a battle using swords, trumpets, torches, and clay pots? Well, swords you can understand, can't you? But trumpets, torches, and clay pots?! What do they have to do with winning a battle?! Well, would you like me to tell you about that? All right.

This true story is found in the Bible in the book of Judges, right after the story of Deborah. It takes place after the children of Israel (later called the Jews) had left Egypt and the Lord had taken them to the land of Canaan that He had promised them they would have. But then sometimes the children of Israel would forget how good the Lord had been to them, and they would begin worshipping idols. How silly! And also how wicked of them. Idols can't do anything, can they? But the Lord can do things, and He does. And only the Lord God is to be worshipped, isn't He? Also, when this idol worshipping would happen, the Jews started doing mean things, too.

Well, when all this would happen, the Lord would stop protecting the Jews and would let their enemies come in and conquer them. Then the children of Israel would remember that they had been wicked and would be sorry and would ask the Lord to forgive them and to make the enemies go away. So then the Lord would have a man do something that would make the enemy go away. This man would be called a judge. (Yes, I know that one judge was a woman named Deborah! But the others were all men. I'll tell you about Deborah another time.)

Well, the story I'm going to tell you today is about one of the times that the children of Israel, the Jews, had been worshipping idols again, and this time the Lord let their enemies, the Midianites, come in and conquer them. And then the Jews hid in caves and dens and strong places. The Jews would plant crops, but when the crops were ripe, the Midianites would come and steal them. So it was hard for the Jews to have enough food, wasn't it? Also, the Midianites would bring their cattle and camels and let these animals eat the crops the Jews had planted. And that made it hard for the animals of the Jews to have enough food, too. This went on for 7 years.

Finally the Jews cried out to the Lord, and the Lord sent a prophet to them. This prophet told them, "This is what the Lord says. He says, 'I brought you out of your slavery in Egypt and have given you this good land. I told you not to have anything to do with the false gods in this land, but you disobeyed me.'" The prophet was reminding them that they had forgotten the Lord God, the only real God, and they'd forgotten how very good the Lord had been to them, and instead they had foolishly and wickedly been worshipping idols, false gods, ones that weren't even real.

But the people were sorry they had disobeyed the Lord, and the Lord loved them, so He had a man be a judge and deliver them from their enemies. This man's name was Gideon, and this is the story I'm going to tell you today.

Okay, then. There was this Jewish man named Gideon. And one day Gideon was out by a winepress and he was threshing wheat. He had cut the wheat down, and now he was hitting the wheat stalks to make the wheat seeds fall out so they could grind up the seeds to make flour and then use this flour to make bread, or they might simply roast the seeds and eat them that way. Now Gideon didn't want the Midianites to know what he was doing, because they might come and steal his wheat, so Gideon was hiding while he was threshing his wheat.

And while Gideon was threshing the wheat, an angel of the Lord came and sat under an oak tree near him. The angel said to him, "The Lord is with you, you brave man."

Now Gideon didn't know this was an angel, so he said, "Oh, sir, if the Lord is with us, why are we having all of these troubles? And where are all of the miracles that our fathers told us about that the Lord did in Egypt?"

And Gideon said, "But now the Lord has forgotten us and has let these Midianites conquer us." (Of course, all of their problems were because they had forgotten the Lord and were worshipping idols, wasn't it?)

Then the Lord looked at Gideon and said to him, "You go in your strength and you will save the children of Israel from the Midianites. I'm sending you."

Gideon didn't know what to think! And he said to the angel of the Lord, "Oh, sir, how could I save Israel?! Why my family is poor, and I'm the least important in my father's house."

The Lord said to Gideon, "I will be with you, and you are going to strike the Midianites as if they were just one man."

Gideon then said, "Please show me a sign. Please don't leave until I go and then come back with a present for you."

The angel of the Lord said, "I'll wait until you come back."

So Gideon went and got a lamb and some unleavened bread/cakes (sort of like pancakes). He cooked the lamb and put the meat in a basket and then put the juice from the meat in a pot, and he took all of this over to the oak tree where the angel was waiting for him and gave him the food.

Then the angel of God said to Gideon, "Put the meat and the unleavened cakes on this rock and then pour out the meat juice." And Gideon did as he said. (Gideon still thought this was just a man!)

Well, the angel of the Lord had a staff in his hand, like a walking stick, and he reached the staff out and touched the meat and the bread -- and suddenly, what do you think happened? Why, fire came up out of the rock! And the fire burned up the meat and the unleavened bread/cakes! And

what do you think the angel of the Lord did then? Why, he just disappeared!!

Then Gideon knew that this hadn't been just a man, but that it had been the angel of the Lord! And he said, "Alas, O Lord God! I've seen an angel of the Lord face to face!" Gideon was scared!

But the Lord spoke to Gideon and said, "Peace be unto you! Don't be afraid! You aren't going to die!" Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, the only real God.

Well, that same night the Lord spoke to Gideon again. The Lord said to him, "You take your father's young bull. Then you go and tear down the altar to Baal, that is in your father's yard, and cut down the grove that is there by it." (This grove was probably a bunch of poles stuck up in the ground around the idol's altar.)

And the Lord said to Gideon, "And you build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock. Build it in an orderly way and then kill the young bull and put it on the altar as a sacrifice and burn it with the wood of the grove that you cut down."

Imagine that! Gideon's father evidently had a big place on his own property where people used to come and worship Baal, that false god!!

So what do you think Gideon did? Why, he obeyed the Lord. Gideon took 10 of his men servants with him, and he did just what the Lord had told him to do. He tore down the altar to that false god; he cut down the grove; he built an altar to the Lord; and then he offered a sacrifice to the Lord (the only God!), using the wood that he'd chopped down.

Gideon did this at night, because he was afraid of the others in his father's house and afraid of the men of the city. You see, they worshipped that false god, so Gideon didn't want them to see what he was doing.

Well, the next morning, the men of that city got up, and what do you think they found? Why their altar to their false god had been all thrown down, and their grove had all been cut down and burned up! And the other altar had been built and a sacrifice made on it!

Then these men said to each other, "Who did this?!" They asked around, and they found out that Gideon had done this.

Well, the men of that city were really mad! They went to Gideon's father and said to him, "Bring your son out so we can kill him! We'll kill him because he has torn down Baal's altar and has cut down the grove!!"

Now, even though Gideon's father had had this altar to the false god and the grove on his property, do you think he wanted his son Gideon to die? No! So he said to the men of the city, "Why do you have to stand up for Baal? Can you save Baal? Why, let Baal stand up for himself!

Why, anyone who thinks he has to stand up for Baal should be killed this morning! After all, if Baal is a god, he can stand up for himself if he doesn't like it that someone threw down his altar." (But, of course, Baal wasn't real, so he couldn't stand up for himself, could he?!)

So the men of the city didn't kill Gideon.

Well, about that time a whole bunch of the enemies of the children of Israel, the Midianites and some others, all gathered together and set up their camp in a valley there in the land of the Jews.

Now, do you remember what the angel of the Lord had first said to Gideon? Yes, he had told him, "Go in your strength, and you will save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. I am sending you." Do you remember that? So Gideon began being a judge of Israel (the Jews) and to deliver them from their enemies. But how did he do that? Well, let's go on, and I'll tell you! (Isn't this exciting?!)

Okay, then. The Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and Gideon blew on his trumpet, and men from among his relatives came to him. Then Gideon sent messengers out to different Jewish tribes, and 32,000 men went to meet Gideon.

But it sounds as if Gideon still weren't quite sure that he was really going to be able to save the children of Israel from their enemies, because he said to God, "If you really are going to save Israel by me as you said, please really show me. I'll put a fleece (a woolly sheep skin) out tonight on a flat piece of dry ground. In the morning if the fleece is all wet with dew but all the ground is still all dry, then I'll know that you really are going to save Israel by my hand as you said." Gideon was asking for a miracle, a sign that God really was going to let him lead the Jews into battle against their enemies and that God would be with them and that they would win against their enemies.

So Gideon put the fleece out on the dry ground, and the next morning when Gideon got up, what do you think he found? Why, the fleece was all wet with dew, but the ground was all dry. In fact, the fleece was so wet that when Gideon wrung it out, he got a whole bowl full of dew, of water! But the ground was dry! That was a miracle, wasn't it? Because otherwise the fleece and ground would both have been wet or both have been dry, wouldn't they?

Well, Gideon still wasn't quite sure, so he asked God again. He said to God, "Please don't be mad at me. I'll only ask you something one more time. Please, this time I'll put the fleece out again, and will you make it so that this time the fleece will be dry but the ground will be wet with dew?"

So Gideon put out the dry fleece again that night, and in the morning the fleece was still dry, but the ground was all wet. That was another miracle, wasn't it? So now Gideon knew for sure that the Lord was with him. Then Gideon and all of the Jewish men with him got up early and set their camp up sort of near the Midianites.

It sounds as if Gideon was camped up on a hill, and the Midianites were camped down in a valley. And the Bible says that there were so many Midianite soldiers, that it was as if the valley

were full of grasshoppers! There were over 130,000 Midianites soldiers! And, remember, Gideon only had about 32,000 men with him! Why, the Midianite army was 4 times as big as Gideon's army, wasn't it?!

But the Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men with you. I want you all to know that I am giving the Midianites to you. I don't want you thinking that you are beating them yourselves."

And the Lord said to Gideon, "You go tell the men who are with you that whoever is afraid should go back home." So Gideon did. He told them that anyone who was afraid should go back home, and 22,000 of his men went back home! This left Gideon with only 10,000 men, didn't it? Remember, though, that the Midianites had a great big army, an army that was now 13 times larger than Gideon's!

But the Lord spoke again to Gideon and said, "There are still too many men with you. Take them down to where the water is, and then I'll tell you which ones are to go with you."

So Gideon did as the Lord had said. He took his now much smaller group of men down to the water. Then the Lord said to Gideon, "All right. Watch how they drink the water. The ones that pick up the water in their hands and lap it up like a dog, put those in one group. And the ones that kneel down and drink right from the water, put them in another group." So Gideon did. And only 300 men picked the water up in their hands and drank from their hands.

Then the Lord said to Gideon, "I'm going to save you with only those 300 men. I will deliver the Midianites into your hand. Have the others all go back." And Gideon did that. Now there is nothing wrong with kneeling down and drinking right out of the water, but in this case, this was the way that the Lord chose to divide the men up.

But why would the Lord end up having over 31 thousand of Gideon's men go home, leaving him with only three hundred men to fight against a great, big army of over 130 thousand soldiers? Why, that would mean that the Midianite army was over 400 times larger than Gideon's tiny army!! Do you remember why the Lord did this? Yes, it was because the Lord was with Gideon, and the Lord wanted the children of Israel (the Jews) to know that it was the Lord who was going to win the battle against the Midianites. The Lord didn't want the Jews to think they had won because they were so strong or smart. And after they won, the children of Israel would know that the Lord was God, wouldn't they? The glory of the victory would rightly go to the Lord. And wouldn't this be a good way to teach the children of Israel to trust the Lord and only worship Him?

Anyway, then Gideon and the 300 men took their food and their trumpets, and they were camped on a hill with the Midianites in the valley below. But the rest of the Jews went home. And I think that Gideon and those 300 men must have been very brave and must have had a lot of faith in God, don't you?!

Well, that same night, the Lord spoke to Gideon again and said to him, "You get up and go down to that big army, for I have given them into your hands."

Then the Lord said to Gideon, "But if you're still afraid, you take your servant with you and go down to the enemy army and listen to what you hear, and then you'll feel braver about going down to that big army."

So Gideon took his servant and went quietly down the hill to the edge of the Midianite camp. There were thousands and thousands of Midianites, and they had thousands and thousands of camels. And Gideon heard two of the Midianites talking together. One of them said, "I had a dream. A little barley bread/cake came rolling down the hill into our camp and hit a tent, and the tent fell down flat."

The other man said, "Oh, that means Gideon, a man of Israel. For God has delivered Midian and all the armies into his hand."

Well, Gideon knew for sure then that God was with him, and he worshipped God. And Gideon went back to his tiny army and said, "Get up! For the Lord has delivered the army of Midian into your hand!"

Then Gideon told his tiny army the plan they would use, and they obeyed him. And what do you think that plan was? Well, I'll tell you! (And this is where the trumpets, torches, and clay pots are going to come in!)

Now, remember, Gideon and his few men were up on a mountain, and the Midianites were down in the valley. So first Gideon divided his 300 men into 3 groups, and he had them go all the way around the great, big camp of the Midianites. And each man had with him a trumpet and a torch and an empty clay pot. "Now," said Gideon, "you wait and do just what I'm going to do. When my group and I blow on our trumpets, you blow on your trumpets and start shouting, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!'"

Now why would Gideon have them all take a trumpet, a torch, and a clay pot? Well, first let me explain something before I go on. You see, in an army, usually not everyone had a trumpet or a torch. No. Usually only the leader of a big group of soldiers would have a trumpet. So if it were night time and you were camped in the valley and you heard a few trumpets and looked up on the hill and saw a few torches, what would you think? Why, you'd think that there were lots of soldiers up there, wouldn't you? But if you heard a lot of trumpets and saw a lot of torches, 300 of them, all around you, you'd think you were surrounded by a really great big army, wouldn't you?! But what about the clay pots? Well, let's go on with the story and find out, okay?!

So the 300 men of Israel each took a trumpet and a torch and a clay pot. They lit the torches and then put the clay pots over the torches so that the light didn't show. The men of Israel were up the hill, and they sneaked around until they had surrounded the great big Midianite army camped down in the valley.

Now, it was the middle of the night. It was all dark and quiet, and everyone in the enemy

camp was asleep except the guards, and it sounds as if they had just changed their guards.

Then suddenly, out of this quiet darkness, there came all around the camp the loud blowing of 300 trumpets! The 300 clay pots were taken off of the torches and were then thrown down on the ground, making a loud, crashing noise! The 300 flaming torches were held up! And there was a great shouting, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!!"

And the blowing of 300 trumpets, and the loud crashing of 300 clay pots as they were thrown down and broken, and the shouting, all of this made a tremendous racket!! And the Midianite army woke up! They all jumped up and grabbed their swords! They were still half asleep, and they didn't know what was happening! And up on the hill the Jews kept blowing their trumpets with one hand and holding up their torches with the other hand! Just think how confusing that would be to the Midianites soldiers who'd just waken up in the dark! They'd heard all those trumpets and they'd looked up and seen all those torches, and they must have thought that they were surrounded by an enormous army!

So now in the midst of all that confusion down in the dark valley, the Midianite soldiers began running around! And as they ran around, the Midianites began bumping into each other! And God made it so that as they bumped into each other, the Midianites thought that the Jews were right there in their camp fighting them! So the Midianite soldiers began fighting with each other there in the dark, and they began killing each other!! Then after they'd killed a lot of each other, the Midianites that were left all began running away. Yes, this big army was running to get back to their land of Midian!

And Gideon's tiny army hadn't had to do anything but blow trumpets and wave torches and watch the Midianites fight each other up to that point, had they?! But then as the Midianites started running away, then other Jews joined Gideon's 300 men, and they all began chasing the Midianites.

But the Midianites had a problem here. You see, the land of Midian was across both the Jordan River and another river from where Gideon was, so the Midianites would have to find shallow places in those 2 rivers, and then cross the rivers to get home, wouldn't they? (Those shallow places are called fords.) So what do you think Gideon did?

You probably guessed it! Yes, Gideon sent messengers out to other Jews saying, "Come out against the Midianites and get down to the rivers before they do! Take control of the fords!" And that's what they did. So the men of Israel had control of the fords, the places where the Midianites would try to cross the 2 rivers, to get back to their own country, Midian. And the men of Israel killed the Midianites. Whesh!!

Well, Gideon had some more adventures as he chased the Midianite army away, killing them as they ran. But I'm not going to talk about them here. However, if you want to, sometime you can read about them yourself in the 8th chapter of the book of Judges in your Bible.

Anyway, after the Midianites were all beaten and killed and chased away, the men of Israel

wanted to make Gideon to be like their king to rule over them and then have his son and grandson to be kings after him, but he wouldn't let them. Instead, Gideon told them, "No. I won't rule over you, and my son won't rule over you. The Lord will rule over you." And Gideon went home and lived to be an old man, and the Jews didn't worship the idols of the other nations all the time that Gideon was alive.

So the Lord had let Gideon, with only a very tiny army, be a great deliverer, hadn't He? Gideon, with the Lord on his side, had saved, had delivered, the children of Israel from their enemies, the Midianites. But we have an even greater Deliverer than Gideon was. Yes, we have a Deliverer Who can save us forever. Who is our Deliverer? That's right, our Deliverer is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, how does Jesus deliver us? And from what does He deliver us? Well, God the Father loves us so much that He sent Jesus (God the Son) to earth to die for us, delivering us from the penalty of our sins. That penalty for sins is that we shouldn't be able to go to heaven and be with the Lord, isn't it? But Jesus, Who never did any sins Himself, loves us so much that He willingly died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. And as proof that He could do this for us, 3 days later Jesus was alive again; and hundreds of people saw Him alive before He went back to heaven. And if we trust in Jesus to save us from our sins, He will. Then someday we can be with Him forever! How wonderful!

Yes, Gideon was a judge and deliverer for a while, but the Lord Jesus is a Judge and Deliverer Who can deliver us forever! And though Gideon wouldn't let the children of Israel make him to be king, some day the Lord Jesus is coming back to earth as a conquering King, isn't He? And He will be King of the whole world forever! King Jesus, our Deliverer!