

INTRODUCTION

The story of Gideon is a classic tale of God's mercy towards his erring people, and how he uses an inadequate person to fulfil his gracious purpose.

THE PEOPLE

The people involved in the story were descendants of the Israelites who came out of Egypt with Moses.

They were God's covenant people, different in that sense from every other society. They inherited God's promise of the Messiah. They were officially committed to him as he was to them. They had his laws and promise of protection. Loyalty was a lasting issue - he would never break his promise, and they were obliged to worship him alone.

When the events recorded here took place they had broken their covenant with God by worshipping the fertility gods of the surrounding society, especially Baal and Ashtoreth. Love, loyalty, and obedience had gone. They had provoked God to anger.

They had broken the relationship, and he withdrew. They no longer had his protection. Large tribes of semi-nomadic people invaded and occupied the land during harvest and 'God's people' could not resist. Their economy was destroyed.

A brief conversation followed. They remembered God and cried for help. He sent his prophet to remind them of their sin.

THE PERSON

Enter Gideon. This chapter records a conversation that goes: God; Gideon; God; Gideon. The 'Angel of the Lord' appeared while Gideon was threshing wheat. As the story unfolds it becomes obvious that expression means "The Lord appearing". His greeting ("Mighty man") made Gideon feel his inadequacy. God did not answer his question or sympathise with his lament - these are not relevant when God appears. God stated what Gideon would become. It also indicated what God would do by him.

Gideon was disturbed by the sense of the supernatural and by the challenge it set him. He thought God's salvation was a thing of the past, and asked for a sign. When God identified himself by accepting his sacrifice Gideon was terrified. God gave him peace by his Word. Then Gideon worshipped.

God spoke again giving Gideon a task to perform. He was to destroy the community's place for Baal worship (located in his father's property, and offer his father's bull. (The bull was a sacred animal in Baal worship). That addressed the heart of the problem - not an invading army but disloyalty to God. It was a public act. And it would show sincerity by dealing with wrongdoing in his home. God gave protection from an unexpected quarter - his father, thus showing what he was able to do.

Gideon showed faith and fear. Another invasion took place. The Spirit of God "clothed himself" with Gideon so that he summoned an army. Then fear took over, and he asked God for a sign. God condescended to his weakness and gave him a sign, as he does with us in the Lord's Supper.

LESSONS

The most important matter is not trouble or prosperity; it is keeping covenant with God. The greatest resource is not our ability but God's grace. "Have faith in Christ" is the message to us.