

## **The Way of the Lord is Hope, Not Despair**

Judges 6-7

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Christianity is a religion of hope, built solidly upon a Bible of hope. This hope is not a mere wishful thinking, but rather a confident, certain expectation. Our hope is firmly anchored in Christ, for even death which seizes and imprisons every other man could not keep the Lord Jesus in its grip. The tomb is empty, our Savior lives, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. Thus, every Lord's Day is a renewal of our hope that Jesus is alive and is reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Take away our confident and optimistic hope in the Lord and we will act like ineffectual losers rather than confident overcomers. We will sound more like victims than victors. Words like "impossible" or "hopeless" are not a part of God's vocabulary. The angel, Gabriel, told Mary, "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Do you feel like you are in an impossible trial in which you cannot see the light of day? Have your fears and worries paralyzed you so that you are afraid to move in any direction? Dear ones, there is real hope in Christ today; for nothing shall be impossible with God.

Let us consider today the seemingly hopeless trial that Israel faced, and the Almighty God that carried them through it. The main points are: (1) A Seemingly Hopeless Trial That Confronted Israel (Judges 6:1-10); (2) An Unlikely Hero (Judges 6:11-40); (3) The Means of God's Salvation (Judges 7:1-18).

### **I. A Seemingly Hopeless Trial That Confronted Israel (Judges 6:1-10).**

A. The homeland of Israel had been invaded by the armies of the Midianites, Amalekites, and children of the East. For 7 long bitter years these innumerable hordes of people, like a plague of locusts had raped and pillaged their land, homes, and livestock. Israel, like moles, had burrowed themselves into holes, dens, and caves in order to escape the wrath of these fierce invaders and oppressors. Israel was in this seemingly hopeless trial due to their rebellion against the Lord (Judges 6:1). Israel was learning again that what you entertain you will follow, and what you follow will eventually rule over you (whether lusts, anger, pleasure, other gods, fear, worldliness, compromise, hypocrisy).

B. Israel's situation was desperate. God's Word says in Joshua 6:6: "Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites. However, there was hope for Israel and for you, as long as you do what Israel did in Judges 6:6: "and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord." Hope begins here. Have you come to realize your own impoverished condition due to the sin into which you have fallen? There is no hope apart from confessing your sin, repenting, and renewing your loving obedience to God. Like helpless children, they humbled themselves realizing where their sin had brought them, and cried unto the Lord for His help. Have you turned from finding your hope in yourself/others to Jesus instead?

### **II. An Unlikely Hero (Judges 6:11-40).**

A. Here is where we meet Israel's deliverer, Gideon. The Lord first shows us Gideon's weaknesses so that we understand that he was no super hero.

#### **1. Gideon was not a man of great courage.**

a. The Angel of the Lord (a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ) appears unto Gideon while he was secretly threshing his wheat—not in the open but in the privacy of his wine press (Judges 6:11). In fact, Gideon probably received the shock of his life when the Lord appeared to him (Judges 6:12). He was not yet that mighty man of valor, but by God's grace he would become such.

b. When the Lord appeared unto him, he was not out leading some crusade against the Midianites, but was hiding in fear.

c. When God told Gideon, you are the man through whom I will deliver Israel, Gideon wasn't jumping up and down for joy at the calling (Judges 6:15).

d. He did not have the courage to destroy the images by day (Judges 6:25-27). He was afraid even though God had specifically told him He would be with him and confirmed it by a miracle (Judges 6:21).

2. **Gideon was not a man of great faith.** The Lord had promised Gideon that he would defeat all of Midian as if Midian were just one man (Judges 6:16). And yet Gideon wanted further proof of the Lord's promise that He would be with him (Judges 6:36-40). This was not an evidence of faith, but weakness of faith. This is not how we are to discern God's will. God has spoken to us—in His Word (Romans 12:1-2).

B. I can identify with Gideon's weakness in faith, his lack of courage, and his fear of a seemingly impossible trial. I don't condone Gideon's (or my own) weakness and fear (it is a grievous sin against the power, love, and faithfulness of God). But the Lord has shown you how human Gideon was so as to encourage you that if Gideon could become a hero of the faith by God's grace and could triumph over his seemingly impossible trial, so can you. There is hope in our Almighty God.

C. Although Gideon was weak in faith, he was not dead in faith (he may have been a bruised reed or a smoking flax with only faith the size of a mustard seed, but he did embrace the Lord as His Savior and God). How did Gideon reveal his faith in the Lord? He destroyed the images of Baal in his city. Faith always evidences itself in doing the will of God.

1. God commanded Gideon to destroy the altar of Baal that belonged to his father—an altar of Baal among God's people? Yes. Israel had adopted the ways of the culture around them, and had turned to foreign gods—like Baal (whom God had crushed).

2. Here is the root cause to so many of our sins—idolatry. It may not be a wooden or stone image, but rather trusting the creature rather than our Creator to supply all our needs or in coveting and loving the people and pleasures of this life more than the Lord (Colossians 3:5). If we would know the hope of God in our lives, we too must turn from all things that have become our first love and renew Christ as the first love of our life (for to me to live is Christ). Even that which is good may become an idol in our lives if it becomes our reason for living ("inordinate affection"). The removal of idols in our lives is not what we do once in a while, but that which we must do daily through faith in Christ.

D. Although Gideon was not at this point a giant in the faith, he became one of the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11:32. His faith was evidenced by his obedience in destroying those idols. No doubt, Gideon trembled as he did so, and yet in obedience to the Lord he did so. Courage is not the absence of fear, but is doing what is right in spite of the fear. It is hard to cut down our idols, but God will grant the grace, courage, and strength to do so. With God nothing will be impossible (whether in this life or in glory to come).

### III. **The Means of God's Salvation (Judges 7:1-18).**

A. God wrought His salvation through **a few men** (Judges 7:1-8).

1. The Bible tells us there were about 135,000 Midianites, Amalekites, and children of the East (Judges 8:10). Now Gideon could only muster 32,000 (Judges 7:3). That is a ratio of 4 to 1. But God told Gideon that he had too many men (Judges 7:2). The Lord did not want Israel to boast in themselves as if it was by their power that they had defeated Midian. So the Lord told Gideon to dismiss all who were fearful. 22,000 men departed and returned home, leaving just 10,000 men to fight the 135,000 soldiers of the enemy (now a 13 to 1 ratio). Now the Lord told Gideon he still had too many men (Judges 7:4), and so the Lord eliminated

9,700 leaving just 300 (Judges 7:5-8). Now it is a 440 to 1 ratio.

2. An impossible situation? Impossible odds? Not with our God with whom nothing is impossible. The Lord has always delighted to show Himself mighty with a faithful few. Let us not be discouraged by our smallness or few numbers, for who has despised the day of small things?

B. Note, secondly, how the Lord brought His salvation to His people by means of a **weak man**, who still feared (Judges 7:9-14). The Lord once again confirmed to Gideon what He had already promised.

C. Thirdly, consider how the Lord worked out His purposes by means of **unusual weapons** (Judges 7:15-18).

1. Not only were the odds against Gideon and Israel by sheer numbers, but what about those weapons? A trumpet, a pitcher, and a torch! Not exactly the kinds of weapons you would use to defend yourself in your homes against intruders. By the fewness of the numbers, by the weakness of the man, and by the unusual weapons used, the Lord was unmistakably demonstrating that it was not by Israel's power or might, but by His Almighty Spirit. God removes all of the boasting and pride of man in order that He alone might be glorified for bringing victory into our lives. God removes all room for boasting, but somehow we always find a way to boast in our gifts, abilities, accomplishments?

2. Victory may not always come in the way and at the time we would like for it to come, but come it will, whether sooner or later; for with God nothing is impossible. How can I be sure? Let me tell you how I can be absolutely sure.

3. I'm reminded of another seemingly impossible situation which faced the disciples of Christ. When Jesus died a cruel and shameful death upon that Roman cross, His disciples wept and grieved at his "untimely" death, believing all that they had hoped for had died with Jesus in that tomb. They faced a seemingly hopeless situation: a dead Deliverer. But in power and victory over death, Jesus was gloriously raised from the grave in order to demonstrate that He had conquered all His and our enemies: the world, the flesh, the devil, and death. The Lord's resurrection clearly demonstrates that Jesus has conquered all His enemies who did everything they could do to keep Him in that tomb. That is your hope in overcoming that which seems impossible to you. We are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us. There is no place for defeatism in our theology or life because of the death of Jesus for us and His glorious bodily resurrection in conquering death.

D. Finally, I want you to know that there are yet Midianites in the land all around us who have erected their false gods. How can a few (like the 300) who are weak in ourselves overcome such odds in seeing reformation brought to our nation and world?

1. Certainly not by adopting their false gods or their resources as the source of reformation. The Lord will bring reformation in His time by clay pots, torches, and trumpets. Just as Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us and was broken (crucified) in order that we might see the glorious light of the gospel and hear Him trumpet forth His truth to all nations, so we must do likewise (2 Corinthians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 1:8).

2. God has not given to us swords, missiles, or tanks to put the Midianites to flight. He has given us few numbers, weak believers, and unusual weapons. We must be broken; we must let the light of the gospel shine; and we must speak forth His truth. That is how the Lord will bring reformation to our nation and to all of the nations of this world. We have a certain hope that He will do it because Jesus Christ lives. There is not a hopeless trial that you face in your life, marriage, family, work, church, or nation. That is sinful thinking on our part. The hope of reformation and transformation always burns brightly because Jesus is not dead, but lives and reigns over all sin and over all His/our enemies.

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