

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GOD

TEXT: JUDGES 7:1-15

Introduction:

1. Judges 6:1 says, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years."
2. God had forsaken them for their sins, and so for seven long years the Midianites ravaged the land of the Israelites, taking their crops as well as their livestock (6:3-6).
3. The Midianites and the Amalekites were raiders, who stole the crops of others (6:3-5). God allowed these heathens to vex Israel as a way of bringing them to repentance (cf. 6:6-10).
4. So severe were these Midianite raids that Israel had to head for the hills and hide out in caves and dens if there was no room in the strong holds (fortified towns with big walls; 6:2).
5. It was during this time that the LORD called Gideon. More space is devoted to Gideon in the book of Judges than to any other judge, with Samson being a close second.
6. God was getting ready to use Gideon to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites, but God could not use Gideon till he first got rid of the altar of Baal that was in his father's house (6:25, 26).
7. God cannot use certain Christians till they first get rid of the idolatry in their lives (e.g., money, rock music, sports, worldly pleasures, etc.).
8. Gideon obeyed the LORD, and he cast down the altar of Baal (6:27). This stirred up the devil and his demons and soon the unsaved townsmen were upset with him (6:28, 29).
9. The mob in Gideon's hometown wanted to kill him but his father, Joash, intervened for him (6:30, 31).
10. It is interesting that Joash was an idolater and a Baal-worshipper but he exercised good common sense in defending his son Gideon (6:31).
11. We are told in Judges 6:34 that "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon." This literally means the Holy Spirit "clothed Himself with Gideon."
12. First Gideon had to cast down the altar of Baal. Then Gideon was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Now Gideon was ready to defeat the Amalekites.
13. Gideon needed encouragement from the LORD because he was easily afraid (6:11, 27).
14. And Gideon felt unsure about his call from God (6:14-16).

15. Gideon felt unqualified (6:15). But God encouraged Gideon by giving him a sign (6:17-21).
16. And then later on, we see that God accommodated Gideon once again (6:36-40).
17. There are many wonderful lessons here in the story of Gideon, but today I would like for us to consider how Gideon often needed encouragement and assurance from the Lord.

I. GOD GIVES US ASSURANCE

1. Gideon needed assurance from God (Judges 6:36-40).
2. Oftentimes people will come forward to get saved and someone will show them from the Bible how to be saved. They will put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and they will receive pardon from sin and everlasting life.
3. But then a few weeks later (or perhaps months later, etc.) they will come forward again. This time they need assurance (I John 5:12, 13).
4. Sometimes people come forward because they were not genuinely saved the first time. This happens for a variety of reasons, but the key is trusting God, and believing His Word.
5. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).
6. God had already told Gideon that He would save Israel from the hand of the Midianites (6:14-16).
7. But Gideon always needed a "sign" from the Lord (6:17). This is human nature. Men are fearful. Men are always doubting God, and always looking for a sign from God.
8. We see this in the life of Gideon. Gideon had already expressed a willingness to obey God's call upon his life, and that is why God graciously accommodated his requests for signs (6:17-21, 36-40).
9. Some people say Gideon was wrong to "put out a fleece." But I believe there are times when it is a good idea to "put out a fleece."
10. It is important to know you are following God's leading. If you have prayed, studied the Bible, asked counsel from other Christians (preferably your pastor or other mature believers), and are still unsure, there is nothing wrong with putting out a fleece.
11. I remember when my wife and I had to decide whether or not to move from NY (Queens) to Norfolk, Virginia. We prayed but were still not sure. We talked to our pastor and other Christians but we were still not sure.

12. Finally, we put out a fleece. If God would send us a good Christian family to rent our house then we would take that as a confirmation from the Lord.
13. The Lord sent a nice family right away. The Lord gave us peace about it and we knew we were in His will.
14. We must be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Here is where many Christians “miss the boat.” Oftentimes we are insensitive to the Holy Spirit’s prompting and convicting.
15. Without being led by the Holy Spirit, we can never know God’s will (cf. Judges 6:34).
16. Our Lord said in John 16:13, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."

II. GOD DIRECTS US BY HIS PROVIDENCE

1. God uses various situations (we refer to this as “providence”) to direct us. As we carefully and prayerfully seek His will, God directs our steps through providential circumstances.
2. We clearly see this in the story of Gideon and the dream of the cake of barley bread.
3. The Lord said to Gideon, “Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand” (7:9). The Lord did not say, “For I will deliver it,” but “I have delivered it into thine hand.”
4. But Gideon was apprehensive. He was up on Mount Gilead with just 300 men. Down in the valley there were Midianites and the Amalekites, spread out over the valley “like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number” (7:12).
5. Humanly speaking, it looked impossible. No wonder Gideon was afraid!
6. So the Lord graciously encouraged Gideon by telling him he could go down with Phurah, his servant (7:10).
7. Then Gideon overheard two Midianite soldiers talking about a dream. In the Midianite soldier’s dream, the cake of barley bread represented Gideon and his 300 men (7:11-13).
8. The interpretation greatly encouraged Gideon and gave him the encouragement and the assurance he needed (7:14, 15).
9. Gideon was so thrilled at the goodness of God, and the providence of God that Judges 7:15 says, "he worshipped."

10. This reminds us of Abraham's servant, when he saw the providence of God and how the LORD answered his prayers and directed him to Rebekah, Genesis 24:26 says, "bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD" (cf. Gen. 24:48, 52).
11. What beautiful lessons on the providence of God! Just as Gideon and Phurah quietly walked up to the tent, the Midianite was explaining his dream to his fellow soldier.
12. And his fellow gave the correct interpretation of the dream -- an interpretation that would surely amaze and encourage Gideon.
13. Just as God had said (Judges 7:10, 11).
14. This cannot be explained as a strange coincidence. This was the hand of God at work.
15. Spurgeon said, "Dreamland is chaos, but the hand of the God of order is here! What strange romantic things our dreams are! — fragments of this and broken pieces of the other strangely joined together in absurd fashion... Thin as the air, inconstant as the wind, the stuff that dreams are made of is vanity of vanities! And yet the Lord fashions it according to His own good pleasure. The man must dream, must dream then and there, and dream that dream which should convey confidence and courage to Gideon! Oh, believe it, God is not asleep when we are asleep! God is not dreaming when we are! I admire the Providence of God in this—do not you? Is it not especially well ordered that this man shall dream and therein declare a truth as deep as any in the compass of philosophy?" ("The Dream of the Barley Cake").
16. Consider the perfect timing of this -- at just the right moment when Gideon and Phurah arrived, the soldier was talking about his dream. Again -- this is the providence of God.
17. The LORD told Gideon, "Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host" (Judges 7:9-11).
18. But notice -- the LORD did not specify *when* Gideon and Phurah were to go down. And yet at the very moment they arrived, Gideon heard about the dream (7:11-15).
19. Undoubtedly, this Midianite did not know that Gideon was nearby listening to his conversation. He did not know that he was being overheard, and yet he was right on schedule!

20. God's perfect schedule! Furthermore, consider the friend's correct interpretation (7:14). This is remarkable!
21. When we consider the providence of God, we always see a series of events, and we see God's hand busy at work. Consider Joseph: sold into slavery, brought to Potiphar's house, put into prison, correctly interpreted the butler's dream, released from prison and brought before Pharaoh, correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dream, promoted by Pharaoh, his brothers brought before him, etc.
22. We see the providence of God step by step, day by day. That is why Joseph said to his brothers, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Genesis 50:20).
23. Again, I will quote Spurgeon. "Considering that there were 50,000 other things that they might have talked of and, considering that there were 50,000 other soldiers upon whom Gideon might have lighted, there were so many chances against Gideon's hearing that singular talk that I do not hesitate to say, "This is the finger of God!" If this were but one instance of the accuracy of Providence, it might not so much surprise us. But history bristles with such instances! I mean not only public history, but our own private lives. Men sometimes make delicate machines where everything depends upon the touching of a certain pin at a certain instant—and their machinery is so arranged that nothing fails. Now, our God has so arranged the whole history of men, angels and the regions of the dead, that each event occurs at the right moment so as to effect another event—and that other event brings forth a third—and all things work together for good."

III. GOD ALWAYS GIVES US THE VICTORY

1. The LORD already told Gideon that the Midianites would be defeated (Judges 6:14-16; 7:7, 9).
2. God has already given us the victory as well.
3. First Corinthians 15:57 says, "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
4. First John 5:4 says, " For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."
5. Perhaps there is someone here today, and you are a bit like Gideon.

6. If you are a child of God, then rejoice because He has already given you the victory.
7. And if you are not saved, you can be saved today. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

CONCLUSION:

1. God's methods of warfare are different than men's (Judges 7:16-21).
2. The lamps (torches) speak of the power of God's Word (7:16).
3. Psalm 119:105 says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."
4. The pitchers (vessels) speak of our physical bodies (7:16). Second Corinthians 4:7 says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."
5. The vessel must be broken so that the light may shine out.
6. The trumpet (4:16) speaks of proclamation.
7. We saw a similar victory in Jericho, when the priests blew their trumpets, and the people shouted, and "the wall fell down flat" (Joshua 6:20).
8. William Cowper said: "God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform..."
9. God is always moving. Our job is to make sure we are moving with Him!