

THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

GIDEON, A MAN OF FAITH AND HUMILITY

Golden Text—Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path.—Psa. 27:11

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

By J. C. Macaulay, D.D.
Approach to the Lesson

The sad story was repeating itself. This time the Midianites were God's whip to scourge His people, with their allies, the Amalekites and some Arabian tribes, called in Judges 6:3 "the children of the east." The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. 25:1, 2), and were a nomadic people with great herds of cattle. Their tactics were to sweep over Israel when the crops were ripe, bringing their cattle with them, devouring the whole land, then retire in time to let the Israelites sow for the next crop, and repeat the procedure. This went on for seven years, the Israelites hoping that each raid would be the last.

Doubtless there was an element of revenge in all this. The nomadic people of the East have long memories, and one generation passes its quarrels on to the next. One of the last acts of Moses was to inflict a crushing defeat on the Midianites, because of the part they played in luring the Israelites into sin (Num. 31). It must have taken them a long time to recover from that blow, and while Israel was a conquering nation, they would not dare to try to strike back. But the old sore kept festering, and as Midian grew stronger, Israel became weaker because of its sin and neglect, till at last, backed by the Amalekites and the Arabians, the Midianites felt themselves equal to the long-contemplated revenge, and God used that as a means of chastening His disloyal and disobedient people. So we see that what looked like the natural proceedings of history are the orderings of the Lord.

Verse by Verse

Judges 6:11—"An angel of the Lord . . . an oak which was in Ophrah . . . Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress." Read "the angel." The phrase is used about sixty times, and refers to the very presence of the Lord. See verse 14. Read also "the oak," apparently a well-known tree. This was Ophrah in Manasseh, not Ophrah in Benjamin (Josh. 18:23). Notice the secret threshing, an indication of the terror throughout

the land.

Verse 12—"The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Both statements looked false. The Lord seemed to have forsaken His people, and Gideon was not showing much valor. But God is with us in the dark, and He calls us what He purposes to make us. See John 1:42. Compare Gabriel's greeting to Mary (Luke 1:28).

Verse 13—"If . . . why . . . where?" This is not the language of faith, but of crushed hope and utter despondency. Do we not recognize our own vocabulary here? Nevertheless, there is enough faith left to know that even the disaster is the work of God's hand. If God can smite, He can also heal (Hos. 6:1). Notice the different printings of "Lord." The first is a respectful title, the second means "Jehovah," and is so written in the Revised Version.

Verse 14—"Go in this thy might . . . have not I sent thee?" The commissioning was accompanied by the needed equipment. The consciousness of being sent of God will help us through any difficulty. Compare the "Go" and the "I" of the great commission.

Verse 15—"Wherewith shall I . . . my family is poor . . . and I am the least." Compare Exodus 3:11; Jeremiah 1:6. For "poor" read "poorest," or "meanest." The most insignificant member of the meanest family in the most oppressed tribe of Israel—that was God's chosen vessel. See 1 Corinthians 1:27-29. But see "Heart of the Lesson."

Verse 16—"Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." The least of men plus God is invincible. The phrase "as one man" indicates completeness. See chapter 20:1, 8.

Verse 17—"Shew me a sign." Was this a dream, an imagination, or was it real? Gideon wanted to put it to the test. See the following verses for the test. The Lord accepted Gideon's offering by turning it into a burnt offering (v. 21).

Verse 25—"Throw down the altar of Baal . . . and cut down the grove." Gideon had tested the Lord, and now the Lord tests Gideon. The savior of Israel must be willing to stand up for the Lord against the idolatry of his own house. The grove (Asherah) probably refers to the wooden image of Astarte (Venus) standing near the altar of Baal. Gideon's father had succumbed to the prevailing idolatry.

Verse 26—"And build an altar . . . and offer a burnt-sacrifice." The destruction of the false altar and the idol was not enough. There must be the positive recognition and worship of Jehovah. It must be done, too, "upon the top of this rock," in full view, not in secret.

Verse 27—"Then Gideon . . . did as the Lord had said . . . by night." His fear was not so much fear of consequences, but fear of interference and prevention. So he destroyed the idolatrous paraphernalia by night, willing to face the consequences in the morning. But the point is, he obeyed, and had ten men willing to stand with him.

Chap. 8:22—"Rule thou over us . . . for thou hast delivered us." A logical proposition. We have more reason to say this to the Lord Jesus. Have we said it? and meant it?

Verse 23—"The Lord shall rule over you." Gideon refused the hereditary kingship, reminding them that they were a theocracy. Here was true modesty and true piety. He could not accept honor which belonged to God.

The Heart of the Lesson

Gideon well represents the man whom God can and will use in His service. First, he was "poor in spirit," which qualified him for the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:3). Like Moses and Jeremiah, he felt himself totally inadequate for the trust committed to him. "Oh! Lord," he exclaimed in amazement, and then recited the reasons for his insufficiency: "my family is the poorest (or, meanest) in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15). Actually there are indications that Gideon's father, Joash, was a man of some influence. The altar of Baal and the image of Astarte were on the grounds of Joash, and these included the rock, or fortress, of Ophrah. He was therefore keeper of the community altar and image (vs. 28-30). In a day when the country was stripped bare, Joash still had some cattle. Then he was able to defy the men of the city, and get away with it (v. 31). But Gideon had no sense of importance.

Gideon also was willing to come clean for God, in his own house and among his own people, even when it meant risk. The command to destroy the altar of Baal and the image of Astarte (see note on

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chap. 6:25) was obeyed without question. Let the men of the city should interfere and forcibly stop him, he carried through the project by night, well knowing that the morning would witness a reaction which might be dangerous for him. But God cannot use us as vessels "unto honour" until we cleanse ourselves of all defilement (2 Tim. 2:21).

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.
So it must be if we are to be used of God.

Then Gideon was willing to follow divine directors, even when these seemed utterly contrary to human wisdom. When God reduced his army to three hundred, as over against the multiplied thousands of the Midianites, Amalekites, and Arabians, Gideon did not argue that this was preposterous, that they were hopelessly outnumbered, and so on. Nor did he reason that some good bows and arrows would be better than God's man, doing God's work in God's way, will see God's wonders.

Finally Gideon was not seeking great things for himself. His notable victories won for him the acclaim of all Israel, so that they offered him the throne, not merely for himself, but for his descendants after him. I have seen a fine old steel engraving of Oliver Cromwell refusing the crown of England. He is reported to have said, in his act of refusal, "Take away that bauble." The fact is that Cromwell had an eye for "that bauble" and would have accepted had it not been for the persuasions of John Owen, the famous theologian. While yielding to the better sense of Owen, Cromwell never quite forgave his good adviser. Gideon's refusal was not like that. The kingship belonged to God (1 Sam. 12:12), and Gideon would not touch the honor which was due to God alone.

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Ontario landlords may now take possession of a rented house for themselves or immediate relatives after they have given six months' notice to the tenant, regardless of the length of time they have owned the property, Hon. Louis Cecile said last week.

Previously this type of notice was without effect unless the dwelling was owned by the landlord prior to April 1, 1952. The new ruling was approved by the Cabinet today.

Mr. Cecile said it was expected that at least two thirds of the municipalities in Ontario would be exempted from the rental regulations about March 2, 1953.

An order in council will be passed about Sept. 2 decontrolling most of the province. The order, however, will not be effective for six months and municipalities may request that the controls be retained.

Mr. Cecile emphasized that, until a municipality is exempted, rental regulations would be enforced. In no instance would the effective date of exemption for any municipality be earlier than March 2, 1953.

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