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**Day 78 – March 19**

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## **Conquering the Land (1400 – 1100 BCE)**

### ***Gideon and the Fleece***

**Readings: Judges 6:1-8:3**

#### ***Reflections:***

- In the story of Gideon we see many of the themes clearly replayed: Israel sins, God speaking, a weak and unlikely savior whom God chooses and then works through powerfully. This should encourage us again to know that God can use anyone as long as their hearts are humbly submitted to him.
- Israel sins and comes under Midian oppression. The fact that Israel had to hide in clefts and caves is a good visual to reflect on. When we are afraid, we are forced into hiding. Many Christians live in hiding from their dominant culture because they are afraid of the consequences. They hide because they are afraid. A question to ask ourselves, “Are we cave Christians?”
- Key statement: “Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.” This sounds pathetic and it is. Humans reach out to God when they are in pain. If everything is going well, we tend to start to ignore him and just do our own thing. Again, this is one of the problems God wants to address through the Spirit. This changes when we truly know God. This is why Paul prayed in Ephesians 1, “May God give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him.” The key is to grow in both knowledge about God and intimacy with him.
- A no-name prophet appears but the message is clearly that of God. It sounds very familiar to everything God says. One of the insights from this is that it doesn’t matter who God speaks through, just know that if God speaks, he expects us to listen.
- Key statement about Gideon when God calls him to be a leader: God says, “Go in the strength you have.” What kind of strength does he have? Gideon replies, “How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, I am the least in my family?” No surprise, right? God delights in showing his power perfected in our weakness. God offers Gideon what he always offers his servants, “I will be with you.” God plus one is a majority.

- Again, Gideon asks for a sign. “Ok God, just want to double check this before I go into a situation that looks like suicide.” Notice that Gideon also combines the request for a sign with worship. The offer of a goat was his way of worshipping God. Also note that the Lord’s appearance has a very physical side of the expression. It seems that God is appearing to him as a man, or as an angel (messenger). Some commentators wonder if this is Jesus appearing within the story of Israel.
- God accepted his worship as “fire flared from the rock and consumed the offering.” We see again the association of God’s presence with fire.
- Here again “face to face” is a picture of intimacy and full acceptance. Gideon is first afraid but then the Lord speaks again, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.”
- Gideon’s altar says it all. The altar’s name: “The Lord is Peace.” In a book so full of war, violence and killing, it is striking that Gideon still understood that God was ultimately a God of peace.
- That night the purification of Israel begins. First, notice that even though Gideon is being obedient to God he is still afraid. He does it at night because of his fear of the people. Now the people are actually protective of the Baal worship. It shows how people bond with the ways they try to save themselves, even if they are sinful. And they carefully investigate and want to kill him. I wonder if the lesson here is that if you do something halfway because of fear, you may make things worse for yourself. In other words, Gideon is trying to protect himself but by doing this at night, it actually puts himself at risk.
- A big showdown happens and the Spirit of God comes on Gideon.
- Gideon puts out a fleece and does it twice. Interesting that God isn’t upset. God doesn’t view this as a lack of faith. He has compassion on Gideon’s fear.
- God in fact wants to lead Israel in her weakness, not in her strength and so begins a process of making her weak. Why? Key statement: “that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength saved her.” We must not be confused by who is saving us. We must not be confused by who is the one with the power. This is for our own good! We must retrain our hearts and minds to always rely on God and his strength and delight in our weakness. It is our most secure position and he knows it.
- The Lord sends home all the fearful. He wants to work with those that have faith in him.
- The second test to remove men from the army contains a verse that seems to have the wording out of order. The phrase reads, “‘Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.’ Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down to on their knees to drink.” What doesn’t make sense is that the term “to lap” is used of dogs who stick their faces in the water to drink. Dogs don’t bring the water to their faces with their paws. And so in the

next statement where it says that God will save Israel with those that lapped, it appears that there is a single misplaced phrase that is confusing the meaning.

- Move one phrase and see how it reads. “‘Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.’ Three hundred men lapped. All the rest got down to on their knees to drink with their hands to their mouths.” Moving this one phrase makes sense of the whole passage and the use of the word “lapped.” It means, God used the dumbest of the dumbest of the dumb, a perfect army for God to show his power through. God didn’t want 300 of his smartest and best fighting men. He wanted the dumbest. Why is the phrase in the wrong place? It appears that it was a textual edit to try to minimize the fact that God was using the dumbest in his army. Later scribes were possibly embarrassed by this text or missed the point and wanted to correct it.
- God speaks to Gideon in a dream. A dream is another way God speaks.
- The army of Midian, Amalekites and all the others is as thick as locusts. This is an image that will be used again in Scripture to describe a vast evil army.
- The dream is interpreted to confirm the will of God.
- The victory of Gideon is classic. He uses deception to cause the opposing armies to turn on themselves. This is a great picture of how evil forces can destroy themselves.
- Gideon calls in reinforcements to capture the towns by the Jordan. It is fascinating that the people complained in victory. These people wanted the bragging rights I guess. We see they are still so full of pride.