

## Gideon

It's not all that great being a national hero. First of all, it was not me, it was the LORD! I was obtuse and inexperienced, and when I actually did do some things right, I was criticized for it.

We had a Midianite problem. These people played with us like a cat with a mouse for seven years. They let us alone for a while, then invaded like a swarm of locusts, destroying what they did not use and withdrawing to leave us in abject poverty, facing starvation. We had complained to the LORD. A prophet reminded us that we had disobeyed the LORD and were worshipping the evil gods of the Amorites, with all their disgusting practices.

I saw a supernatural being, whether an angel or the LORD Himself, I can't say. But I was terrified. After all, the word on the street was, when that happens, you die. He took me completely off balance by calling me a mighty warrior. I was so flabbergasted that I just echoed what everybody was saying: "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."

I had been told that Moses complained to the LORD that he was not a leader, but that had to be false humility. Moses had been raised in the palace of Pharaoh. I was a genuine nobody. So I asked for a sign and when the angel touched my sacrifice with his staff, fire shot out of the rock and burned it up.

The angel reassured me that I would NOT die. Then he illustrated that we had sinned by giving me the assignment of taking down my father's alter to Baal and burning his Asherah pole to make a sacrifice to the LORD. OK, LORD, I get it – even my own family are idol worshippers. I even did it under cover of night because I knew that the men of the city were pretty attached to their lewd and violent pagan rituals. I have to hand it to my Dad. When the mob demanded that he turn me over for execution, he told them that if Baal were really a god, he would be able to defend himself.

That actually got people's attention. In your day you might say, "It went viral," because I became known as "Baal Basher". The word must have gotten to the Midianites because they and their allies gathered at the border. I was suddenly filled with power and conviction, it had to be the Spirit of the LORD because I called the whole country to arms. Then I had second thoughts. I asked for a sign, that a fleece set out in the evening be wet in the morning and the ground dry. But then I had second thoughts about the test. The dew could have evaporated from the ground and stayed in the fleece. So I had to ask for the opposite – dry fleece and wet ground. I was graciously answered.

We got a tremendous response from the people and I was convinced that maybe we really could defeat the Midianites. Then, can you believe it, the Lord said we had TOO MANY! He wanted it to be obvious that He had done it and not our own strength. Just choosing an unqualified general like me was not enough! First, everybody who was scared was allowed to

go home without any shame or repercussions. Then he instructed me to send them down to drink and those who lapped from their hands were chosen – a mere 300 men!

As a final sign, the LORD told me to sneak into the enemy camp and listen. To my shock, they were having strange dreams and were actually terrified of me! The strategy was as strange as that used by Joshua at Jericho. We had torches inside clay jars and trumpets, in the middle of the night at the changing of the watch, we surrounded them, blew the trumpets, broke the jars, held up the torches and shouted, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon.” Now I suppose they could have thought that each torch represented a division of a thousand men but if they had behaved in disciplined military fashion, they would have soon realized that it was a façade. Instead, the LORD showed up by causing them to fight each other. We called for reinforcements to chase those who ran, assure that the kings were killed and their armies decimated.

That should have made everybody happy, but Ephraim complained that they had not been called in the first muster. I pacified them by pointing out that they had captured and killed the two main kings. As we continued the pursuit of the remnant of the enemy, we asked for food from two erstwhile allies and got sarcasm and derision – for which they were later punished. When I took the last two kings of the Midianites, I found out that they had killed my brothers. War is terrible, even in victory. I asked my oldest son to kill them but he was not yet a man and I had to do it.

The people wanted me and my sons to rule, but that little episode reminded me that I should not start a dynasty. The victory was the LORD’s and He should be our ruler. I had a long life after that and a large family, but it would not surprise me if the people returned to Baal and Asherah as soon as I died.

Judges 6:1 – 8:34