

# *Gideon*



Ralph E. Johnson

# Gideon

## A Story of Revival

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## *Prologue*

It has been said that most men live lives of quiet desperation. This may be one reason the media reports a greater concern for spiritual matters today than ever before in history. But such reports must be looked at with care. While many seem to realize an emptiness in their lives indicates a spiritual void, they often attempt to lift themselves by natural means. Many flock to attractive buildings, listen to eloquent speakers and talented musicians and depart services with their emotions in high gear. But the rest of the week lacks any real evidence of inner change that affects their outward behavior.

In fact, depression and divorce, lack of contentment, adultery and fornication, and every conceivable addiction are just as common within the church as among the unchurched. Inspiration that changes lives never comes from elegant ceremonial ritual or human effort. Hearts simply cannot be transformed by the desire or ability of man. Charismatic leaders inspire temporarily but only God refashions the human heart. Only the Spirit of the living God can produce the righteousness, joy and peace that is absent in the lives of so many who regularly attend

worship in thousands of churches across America. Unless we submit ourselves to be changed by the work of the Spirit, all of the natural lifting and emotional inspiration in the world will prove to be but vanity.

The Old Testament contains stories referred to as *types* that foreshadow events in present days. The nation of Israel is an illustration or *type* of today's church in its failure to remain faithful without frequent backsliding. The apostle Paul cautions that what is written about Israel is a warning so that we do not fall into disobedience as did the Hebrews centuries ago (1Corinthians 10: 6-12). So it is that the apostle gives a stern warning to the church today:

*"Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches [the Hebrew people], he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off."*

Romans 11:20-22

Despite this warning and others by Jesus Himself, the church in America has become increasingly complacent and backslidden in recent years. Happiness is taught

instead of holiness, and emphasis is greater on prosperity than on purity. Unbelievably, homosexuality is tolerated in the ordained ministry of not only the Roman church but in Protestant denominations as well. Were there ever desperate need for revival, it certainly is today! We need reminding how the Lord Jesus warns that few find the narrow road that leads to eternal life (Matthew 7:14), that the love of most turns cold in the final days (Matthew 24:12), and that while many are invited to be His bride, few are chosen (Matthew 22:14).

Such warnings are often disregarded in teaching from the pulpit. It is much more common for itching ears to be scratched by compromise of the hard truths in the pure gospel. Salvation without the need for true repentance is promoted and many are being given a false sense of security. In the midst of apostasy however, God is calling America to repent. It is foolishness for us to expect our Creator to continue watching us live in depravity without consequences. Materialism, greed, violence, sexual immorality, and murder of one million unborn children each year by abortion cannot persist without a holy God taking away His hand of blessing and protection. America will either repent or it will very soon feel the hand of God's judgment.

It is my prayer that lessons in this story will stir many hearts. Sadly, we have become satisfied with a taste of God when a great inheritance is available. God is aware of exactly where we are in terms of personal relationship with Him, as well as where we ought to be. Many have heard God speak to them, but haven't answered. The hourglass is quickly running down, so may each of us be given the grace to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. Please join me in a prayer that God will open our spiritual eyes and unplug our spiritual ears so hearts will be softened to hunger for the burden of His heart...the harvesting of souls in fields that are ripe.



# *Chapter 1*

## Setting of the Story



## *Judges 6:1-10*

*Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.*

*When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of*

*slavery. I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."*

The land of Israel enjoyed prosperity and peace for forty years during the days of Deborah, similar to the situation in America for the same length of time after the war in Vietnam until the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001. During this time of peace and prosperity, the people God delivered out of bondage in Egypt adopted the ways of their Canaanite neighbors despite God's command to drive out the heathens and not make covenants of any kind with them. God knew that the corrupt religions and immoral lifestyles of the Canaanites would prove a deadly snare for the Israelites. Nonetheless, shortly after Israel entered the land promised to their forefathers by God, a decline in faithfulness to the Lord began.

Time after time God sent messengers to warn the Israelites and to exhort them to repent. They had not only adopted lifestyles of their pagan neighbors, but had taken up the worship of idols. The chief gods of the Canaanites were Baal, a god of fertility and rain representing prosperity, and Asherah who symbolized military victory. Prophets sent by God emphatically condemned their

false worship, but godly rebuke was always ignored. How similar are the circumstances in America today! The United States is also prideful of its military might and economic prosperity. And what a coincidence that the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> of 2001 struck both the Pentagon and World Trade Center, national symbols of military might and economic power.

God grieved as the Israelites became entangled in their evil practices, just as He is grieving today over scandalous depravity in His church. Eventually God became so distressed by disobedience that He gave the Israelites over into the hands of Midianite terrorists. For the next seven years, Israel was severely oppressed and people sought refuge in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. When harvest time came, the enemy swarmed the land like a cloud of locusts to steal crops as well as sheep and cattle. In time, the land became so ravaged by the Midianites that the Israelites cried to the LORD for help in their desperation.

However, the Israelites paid only lip service to the LORD with their worship and ritual sacrifices. Meanwhile, they continued to do evil in the eyes of God by living in a way that was virtually identical to that of

heathen neighbors. This closely resembles America today. Almighty God has blessed this nation since the days of the founding fathers, yet Baal worship is everywhere in evidence. The lifestyle of most Christians is a mirror image of that of the unbelievers. Indeed, the time has come about which Paul is telling: *“For a time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear”* (2 Timothy 4:3).

Many in the church today are quite satisfied with having a brief Jesus’ date on Sunday morning as long as they don’t hear convicting words about self-centered lives and harboring of sin in their hearts. They want the gospel presented like mouthwash, something to be swished about and spit out if distasteful. On the other hand, they rebel when the gospel is presented as the Word of God to be swallowed hook, line, and sinker. The idea of a loving God is acceptable, but mention of God’s wrath is strongly resisted. The great concern is one’s worldly state and financial condition, and though money has the imprint of *In God We Trust*, the only thing really trusted by many is money itself.

And faith is considered to be something we handle rather than something that handles us.

Adults sacrifice the responsibility of childrearing if not marriage in a search for prosperity, and working mothers are almost the norm. Thought of laboring in fields ripe for harvest of souls is replaced by sporting events, television, and 'surfing the net.' The command of Jesus to deny self has given way to luxurious living and the storing up of treasures on earth instead of in heaven. This is true not only for the sheep, but for shepherds as well. Ministry scandals are common and many pastors avoid saying a great deal about bearing crosses so as to avoid a charge of hypocrisy. And submitting to being molded on the Potter's wheel is no longer an acceptable idea in the mind of the average churchgoer in America.

Sadly there is minimal outrage in the church about evil that permeates nearly all aspects of American life. Pews are filled by people with besetting sins that guarantee a failure to inherit heaven unless they repent (Galatians 5:19-21). Greed, selfish ambition, bitterness, sexual immorality, pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, jealousy and lack of forgiveness are tolerated without rebuke.



Sermons are delivered by *“godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality”* (Jude 4). Grace is explained as a frosting of mercy guaranteed to cover life-time cakes of ungodly self-indulgent living. The biblical definition of grace is ignored as not only bringing salvation, but the work of God that *“teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives”* (Titus 2:11,12). So many are used to messages that offer eternal salvation in the absence of true repentance that they resist being told they must live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. Any admonition that one must suffer for Christ in order to share in His glory is usually avoided much like one attempts to avoid developing cancer or AID’s (Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 2:19-21).

When the Israelites cried out to the LORD, a prophet was sent to warn people to not worship the gods of the heathens, but they ignored rebuke. The same message is given to the church today by God: *“I am the Lord your God. I’ve delivered you from the power of sin and bondage of Satan. I gave my Son as an atoning sacrifice for your sins, and sent my Spirit so you can have power to separate from sin and live in accord with my*

*will. But you refuse to listen. You continue to worship gods of the world and to lust after created things instead of seeking me. I've given you everything needed to be free, yet you cling to idols. You are exactly like the Israelites that I cut off in my wrath."*

Seduced by teaching that assures of eternal security despite ungodly living, the American church is in sad repair. Marriages are broken and being terminated. Hearts are broken with millions under treatment for depression and thousands committing suicide. Lives are broken by a spectrum of addictions ranging from alcohol and drug abuse to pornography and gluttony, not to mention indulgent shopping that rarely is rebuked from the pulpit. Bodies are broken as abortionists tear apart unwanted viable children during late-stage pregnancy. Identities are broken as women dress like men, and men take hormones to appear female. Many live in prosperity, lacking a cry in the heart for the lordship of Jesus and fearing revival because of what they might be asked to sacrifice.

We've become a nation as oppressed as the Israelites in Gideon's day. We hide as well, but in clefts of deception, caves of self-

centeredness, and strongholds of addiction. We also refuse to accept godly rebuke. It's exactly what scriptures foretell, that there'll be a great falling away or rebellion from the truth (Gk *apostasia*) in the days before the return of Jesus (Matthew 24:10-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3,4; Revelation 2,3). Many desire to have a touch of Jesus on their life but fail to manifest His power because they are unwilling to yield to His lordship. They live in spiritual poverty, far below the inheritance available by grace, and God is not able to fulfill the purposes He prepared for their lives (Ephesians 2:10).

The world has seen more than its share of Christians living in defeat. There is a great need for the world to see people live in joy and peace, filled with divine power and having victory even in the midst of fiery trials. Believers who grumble and complain during their struggles bring shame on the name of Christ. They are scarcely different than the Israelites who were cut off by God in the wilderness because of their unbelief and failure to trust God. Such poor witness by many who profess Jesus is certainly one of Satan's most useful weapons against the gospel. Earnest prayer is needed that we

might see much more *possession* of Jesus and less empty *profession*.

Often the world's only contact with Jesus is with those who are to be His hands and feet here on earth. Those who commit spiritual adultery with the world are not the soldiers that God seeks for His army. Minds are not renewed, nor are lives transformed, when people seldom read the Bible and fail to maintain a consistent prayer life. While salvation is obtained by grace, to believe in Jesus is only a beginning. God has chosen us *"to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit"* as well as *"through belief in the truth"* (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul writes, *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified"* (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Yet sanctification is all but ignored in many churches that record conversion decisions but fail to instruct the converts to live as disciples of Christ.

There is no room for two kinds of life in a person indwelt by the Spirit of God. All believers must determine to allow the Spirit to put to death the misdeeds of flesh, and not live by the sinful nature (Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:19-21). We can't mock God. Each of us will reap exactly what he sows: *"The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the*

*one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:8).*

Sanctification is never obtained by a diligent effort on our part to imitate Jesus. It occurs only as we are willing to strip ourselves naked of self-interest. Nothing else permits the Holy Spirit to have control so that He can impart into us His fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control.

When Jesus warns the love of most turns cold in the last days, He is speaking of sacrificial love known as *agape* that is to characterize all who are in Christ. This love is not affectionate or sexual love that totally consumes the focus of society today. *Agape* is considering others better than oneself, a willingness to sacrifice one's own interest in helping others. It's the type of love shown by Jesus in dying for us while we were still sinners. So often we see a 'Me first!' attitude in the church and refusal to deny oneself as required of all who'd be disciples of Jesus (Luke 9:23). Such an attitude is so contrary to the Lord saying that others will know we are Christians by the love we show toward one another (John 13:35).

In writing to the church in Ephesus, Jesus warns that those who have lost their

first love and devotion to Him must repent and return to things they did at first *or else* (Revelation 2:4-5). Some of us can recall the excitement for things of God when we first received Jesus in our heart. Now we realize this zeal has disappeared. In writing to the church in Laodicea, Jesus warns that He'll vomit the "*lukewarm*" from His mouth and commands them to repent of indifference ...*or else* (Revelation 3:16,19). In fact, letters to five of the seven churches that represent the universal church warn that repentance is required (Revelation 2,3). In other words, the church is being called to revival...and that means us.

The Scriptures clearly tell us the last days will see steadily increasing selfishness and wickedness instead of return to a more God-fearing and peaceful world. However, it is possible for pockets of revival to develop in the midst of a general apostasy. In every spiritual awakening over the centuries, the signature or hallmark has always been true repentance. With signs now pointing to the soon return of Jesus, revival is a desperate need. Nowhere is this any truer than in the United States. God is warning our nation in these days, "*I've had enough, America. If*

*you fail to repent of your sins, I'll remove my hand of protection and blessing over you."*

To appreciate the setting of the story about Gideon, we need to understand the difference between the perfect will of God and His permissive will. The perfect will of God is unchanging. God *"does not change like shifting shadows"* (James 1:17). It is with His permissive will that God allows things to take place for our benefit and His greater glory. God allows Satan to attack and bring not only temptation, but illness and death (Job 1,2; Luke 22:31). However, the devil is never free to act apart from the permissive will of God.

The permissive will of God operates so we might come to see His perfect will for our lives. It is in this context God promises to work in all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). He also gives a promise that temptation will not be allowed beyond what we can endure and that a way of escape will always be available to us (1 Corinthians 10:13). Trials are also permitted at times to prove our faith genuine (1 Peter 1:7). They are to be faced with joy, knowing that our faith is only matured if faced with opposition (James 1:2-4).

The pull of worldly attractions and of pleasure is so strong in these present days. So it is that radical conversions are not very common among those living in comfort and security. The god of this age Satan uses the deceitfulness of wealth, self-centeredness and self-righteousness to blind their minds (2 Corinthians 4:4). Words spoken through the prophet often fall on deaf ears: *“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other”* (Isaiah 45:22). Not only is Satan the prince of this world (John 12:31) but man chooses to serve him by worship of things created by man instead of worshipping the Creator (Romans 1:25). So it is frequently the case that some type of affliction is required to prompt men to seek the face of God.

It is in this setting of worldliness and backsliding that Gideon is called to repent and become an instrument of God to bring victory over the enemy and spiritual revival to the land. As with Paul following his conversion on the road to Damascus, it will not be just a temporary experience for Gideon. Paul says *“I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven”* (Acts 26:19). In similar fashion, Gideon will be brought into vibrant relationship with Almighty God and will be



used for those good works that God already had prepared for him (Ephesians 2:10).

Before going further, let us be certain to understand the condition of Israel in the days of Gideon. On leaving Egypt under the leadership of Moses, Israel was in a state of grace (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). However they'd become backslidden. Because of evil in the eyes of the LORD, they were given over into the hands of the Midianites. Only as they became severely oppressed did they finally cry out to God for help. It is pure fantasy to think America will be immune to the hand of God's wrath should it continue to ignore His laws. God's nature is unable to tolerate sin without rebuke, and believers can never worship the gods of the land in which they live without feeling His rod of discipline.

When backsliding occurs, there is no vision for godly living and relationship with God becomes stale. At this point, nothing except the grace of God can bring revival. We're warned by Jesus of the danger posed by pleasures, worries of life, and deceitfulness of riches. Satan, the god of this world, uses these things to blind minds and choke the spiritual life of believers (Luke 8:14). And once fellowship with God is interrupted, a crisis is often needed to break complacency

# GIDEON

and create an awareness of separation from God. If America fails to repent, our country may well learn what it is to have Midianites terrorize the land.

On the other hand, if America cries out to God with broken and contrite hearts, a merciful Father in heaven promises that He will hear. The story of Gideon illustrates the steps necessary for revival to occur. The story also contains certain principles that characterize true revival in contrast to the hyper-emotionalism that occurs in certain situations. Those who are truly thirsty for a closer walk with Jesus will be blessed by the treasures in this account of Gideon.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

Jeremiah 29:11-13

## *Chapter 2*

# The Calling of God



## *Judges 6:11-18*

*The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."*

*"But sir," Gideon replied, "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.'"*

*The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"*

*"But LORD," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."*

*The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."*

*Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you."*

*And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return."*

Disguised as an angel, the LORD first appeared to Gideon while he was threshing wheat. At this point, we find Gideon just as frightened as his countrymen as he hid in a winepress out of fear that the grain he was threshing might be stolen. He hardly would have been a candidate for hero of the year award to lead his people to victory against the enemy. Neither would he likely have been recognized as an evangelist. In fact he was a backslider like all of the others, and even belonged to a family having their own Baal altar and Asherah pole at the house.

A similar situation exists in America. We're a nation of idol worshippers with our emphasis on materialism, pleasure-seeking, sexual immorality, and a wide range of life-controlling addictions. Idol worship passes from one generation to the next as parents condition the children to seek similar goals. These goals become idols, what the parents hold in high esteem becoming important to their children, whether it involves wearing trendy clothes, driving expensive cars, belonging to exclusive golf and yacht clubs, getting high on drugs or alcohol, or seeking social acceptance in one form or another.

Nonetheless, God didn't see another defeated Israelite in Gideon. Even when one lives in self-created defeat, God still issues a call. It's not what we are. It's what God can do with us and through us that is so important in His eyes. God doesn't dwell on outward appearance, but looks past fleshly weakness and depravity to help those who will admit to spiritual bankruptcy. A person with a painless hairline fracture of his arm may resist having a cast applied. But if the fracture site separates and there is severe pain, there will be gratitude for a cast. It is quite similar in the spiritual realm. We tend to do just as we see fit until there's enough brokenness in our heart because of adverse circumstances. Then in our extremity, there finally develops a receptiveness so that God can intervene in our life.

As with Gideon, God never comes to a prodigal harshly or in condemnation. His tender eyes see what can result with mercy and grace if we'll return to obedient faith in Him. *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29). So it was that the angel of the LORD waited until a time of sufficient crisis to approach



Gideon. And before we answer a call of God to revival, a crisis often must bring us to a crossroads in our own life.

The Greek *krisis* translated as crisis literally means a decision point. It is only in time of crisis that many of us reach a point of decision in our spiritual lives. The psalmist writes in regard to his life, *"Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word"* (Psalm 119:67). How true this is for so many of us! We respond to a call to repent of backsliding only when faced by serious adversity. Our human nature is such that we frequently need a good dose of 'shaking up' medicine to get rid of spiritual sickness once it has become full blown.

The call of God to revival, like a call to salvation, is not a matter of reasoning or debate but a matter of the will. Leaning on our understanding is always an obstacle, as is being concerned about how others might react. The call is never for only a few, but to all. Isaiah heard God saying, *"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"* (Isaiah 6:8). While many are called, the ones chosen are those ready to have their spiritual condition changed. God will never force this upon us. We must respond willingly, as did Gideon ...and Isaiah: *"Here am I. Send me!"*

When we hear God's voice calling us to revival, it's a personal call. There is never any point in seeking another's opinion. We must decide on our own as did Gideon. And it is of no profit to dwell on our ambitions, abilities or reputation. God alone knows the plans He has for us, so there's no need to burden ourselves with thoughts about what kind of service we are to undertake or what path to choose. We're meant to surrender with reckless abandon and have the same goal in mind as Paul: *"...that I may gain Christ and be found in him"* (Philippians 3:8). Disciples are never asked to approve what they will do for the Lord, or where they will go. They're meant to walk in obedience once the call of God grips them.

In fact, the call of God never involves common sense. God's purpose is rarely the same as men's. When God calls to revival, it is not to worship more frequently, to study Scripture more diligently, or to pray more fervently. It is to lay down lives for the sake of Jesus day in and day out. The important fact is the vision given us by God and to not forget that we've been bought at a price and are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:20). *"I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me"* (Acts 20:24).

Being called to revival is so different than being born again. It requires giving up the hypocrisy of trying to look like a believer while living outside the will of God. Today's church is filled with many who want Jesus to *reside* in their hearts as Savior to avoid the flames of hell. But they resist allowing Jesus to *preside* in their hearts as Lord. They are unwilling to give Jesus control of their life, often duped by the false teaching of cheap grace and easy salvation. They flee whenever lordship is discussed, not wanting to admit to lack of surrender to the will of God in their daily lives.

When the grace of God brings us to a place of beginning to see ourselves as God does, awareness of pride and sin can be a shock. The experience is not pleasant when one falls under the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in revival. We immediately face a choice as did the disciples when the teaching of Jesus became demanding. Many of the disciples turned back at that time, no longer following Him (John 6:66). Jesus then asked the Twelve, "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" (6:67). It's the same question people face during revival. Do you desire a closer relationship with Jesus, or are you content to stay lukewarm? To withhold an answer to this question is itself an answer.

In light of circumstances in Gideon's life, the greeting by God must have seemed very strange: *"The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."* This is reminiscent of the manner in which Jesus chose disciples for training centuries later. Jesus did not only see men with character flaws such that they'd argue incessantly about who was greatest. Jesus knows what is possible by the Holy Spirit working through ordinary men. The same is true with Gideon. Anyone who will set aside his own agenda and humbly submit to the will of God can become a mighty warrior in His army.

There are other lessons to be learned in this greeting to Gideon.

*"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"*

*"But LORD," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."*

To this question, God replied, *"I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."*

Gideon wasn't living in victory by any stretch of the imagination. Hiding within a winepress, he hardly presented picture of a David facing Goliath or of an Elijah facing

hundreds of false prophets of Baal. Quite to the contrary, Gideon told the LORD that he had a total lack of confidence in his ability. Instead of being filled up with pride over his station in life, we find Gideon exhibiting a character trait that is precious in the sight of the Lord...*humility*. When the Holy Spirit brings backsliding into the open, we hopefully realize that we cannot possibly correct our condition except by the grace of God.

A man brokenhearted over spiritual failure will readily admit that he lacks the power by which to correct the error of his ways. Such a person cries out to God, and trembles at Scripture that warns us of the consequences if we refuse to repent: *"This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word"* (Isaiah 66:2). It is when godly sorrow brings repentance that we are ready for God to break the grip sin has taken on us during backsliding (2 Corinthians 7:10). And here it is that we see the LORD speak an extremely important word to Gideon.

The operative word in God's reply to Gideon is *"together."* When God says, *"Am I not sending you"* or *"I will be with you,"* it is promise for all the strength we will need in His service. The full meaning of grace is only appreciated if we realize that *together*

with Jesus, we can enjoy victory in the face of every worldly temptation, every sin that besets, and every flaming arrow of the devil. It is in failing to realize that we can be overcomers when *together* with Jesus that we are likely to continue hiding in our personal winepresses and thus remain in bondage.

*Together* with Jesus is the kind of a guarantee that we can take to the bank for immediate deposit, no matter what kind of circumstances exist at the moment (Romans 8:28). God is faithful and cannot help but see His promises fulfilled. However, there is a condition for “*working together with him*” (2 Corinthians 6:1, RSV). The condition is that we not receive the grace of God in vain. Our life and service cannot be what God desires unless we are first born again, surrender our self-will, and then seek empowerment by the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

When Gideon asks for a sign that it is really God speaking to him, he is neither doubting the call to be a mighty warrior nor trying to reconcile what he’s been told with his own way of thinking. Few things present a greater obstacle to faith than trying to make God’s Word fall into line with our own understanding. That is a trap into which so many fall, but Gideon is given a measure of

faith to put full trust in God and go all the way without looking back. He just desires a confirmation that it is the God of Israel calling him. In today's jargon, it's as though he were saying, "If it's really you speaking to me, God, I'd appreciate a spiritual Hi-five."

Gideon then asks the LORD to remain in place as he goes to prepare a sacrificial offering. In His patience, God is willing to wait that all would come to repentance and none would be condemned with the world (2 Peter 3:9). God realizes if we are in need of having our faith strengthened, and there is nothing wrong with asking Him to give us confirmation when He calls us. However, it is best to not insist on a sign of our own choosing or we may fail to recognize a burning bush placed right in front of our eyes by a loving and merciful God.

Many of us have the erroneous idea that God only calls men of incredible faith to labor in the harvest. Quite the opposite is true. Moses argued with God when told to bring Israel up out of Egypt: "*O Lord, please send someone else to do it*" (Exodus 4:13). Elijah fled in terror from Jezebel after God had sent fire from heaven to defeat the hundreds of false prophets on Mt Carmel (1 Kings 19:3). Jeremiah protested strongly as

he was appointed a prophet by God: *"I do not know how to speak. I am only a child"* (Jeremiah 1:6). Peter denied he knew Jesus three times after boldly declaring he'd never disown Him (Luke 22:61). And then there is Gideon.

We must not despair when we lack mountain-moving faith on a given occasion. Yes, it is true believers are to walk by faith and not by sight. Still we must humble ourselves before the Lord so that He can lift us up with ever increasing faith. If God calls us to "Come out!" as He did with Abraham, and leave old places like dead churches, it's a mistake to hear His voice and not respond in obedience. As circumcision in the law of Moses was a cutting away of flesh, we're to cut away all that detracts from relationship with God by circumcising our hearts.

God warns with utmost seriousness that we must not reject His call: *"Since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you – when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you"* (Proverbs 1:24-27). The call



of God to revival must always be taken with utmost gravity. To not give heed when God calls is a grievous error, lest anyone allow himself to be deceived.

Making an offering to the Lord may be necessary as did Gideon. While revival is never earned or merited and comes by the grace of God, there still can be obstacles in our lives that demand removal. It is repentance that brings revival, just as repentance leads to salvation. It is not only necessary to turn from lifestyles offensive to God. The sacrifice of good things may be needed to receive the best God has for us. This may involve willingness to surrender self will to follow God's will in a totally unexpected way such as changing occupations or going to a foreign mission field. No matter what type of sacrifice is called for, the only acceptable response is obedience.

Faith is not something that we either handle or control. Faith must be permitted to handle us. This is why Peter tells that it is hard for the righteous to be saved (1 Peter 4:18). Anyone having a true encounter with revival may feel threatened at times. This is why some disciples turned and no longer followed Jesus on hearing the demands of His teaching. Jesus is emphatic about the

fact that there is a great cost in becoming a true disciple. The old life is threatened at once by Jesus' demand that we must die to self in order to save our life (Luke 9:24).

Did you answer a call of God on your life in the past? Were you so enthusiastic about your walk with Jesus that you could not do enough to serve Him or wait for the doors of the sanctuary to open for worship? Your love was intense and passionate – a “first love” is how Jesus describes it. But gradually, through allowing some persistent distraction to develop, the intensity of your commitment began to cool. The time spent in prayer began to slacken as did the time spent in study and meditation on the Word of God.

Now the old compelling for things of God is almost gone. Not only is the fire gone but there is scarcely a spark left. There is no longer any deep grieving for the lost or backslidden. In fact, you have joined the ranks of backsliders yourself. The worries if not pleasures of the world have succeeded in choking your spiritual life. And now your condition is nearly like the seed that Jesus describes as having fallen among thorns in the parable that He tells about a sower and the seed. *“The seed that fell among thorns*

*stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries and pleasures, and they do not mature"* (Luke 8:14).

There is great danger in having been enlightened, sharing in the Holy Spirit, tasting the goodness of the Word of God and its life-giving power, only to fall away (Hebrews 6:4,5). On authority of the bible, a place can be reached where it is *"impossible ...to be brought back to repentance because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace"* (Hebrews 6:6). The Greek in this passage literally refers to those "having fallen away" and stresses this happening as a real possibility.

Is there emptiness in your present relationship with Jesus? Do you find God speaking to you through circumstances in your life? God promises to discipline those who are legitimate children (Hebrews 12:5-8). It may be that you are experiencing difficult times out of God's kindness. Trials may be God's way of calling you to renew your consecration. We are never to view backsliding lightly. Jesus makes this clear in saying the *lukewarm* will be rejected from His presence in the day of judgment (Revelation 3:16).

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Listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit calling you to return to a close relationship with the Shepherd of your Soul. Jesus uses three parables to tell how greatly He desires those who have wandered off to be returned to a place of intimate fellowship (Luke 15). It doesn't matter a bit how much of a prodigal you have been. Our merciful God is faithful to forgive us if we will repent and confess our sins.

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:8,9

## *Chapter 3*

# Acceptable Sacrifice



## *Judges 6:19-24*

*Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.*

*The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And Gideon did so. With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"*

*But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die."*

*So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.*

*Judges 6:19-24*



Gideon realized that his meeting the angel of the LORD brought him to a cross-roads that would shape his entire future. In the past, he had made offerings to idols but now he knew that more was demanded. He must not try to barely slide by with a token sacrifice of some kind. It was time to make an offering that was according to the Law of Moses. Although it would be a hardship for his family since food was so scarce, a goat would be sacrificed along with an ephah of flour to make bread without yeast. Indeed it is in the valley of crisis where we most often decide to make a sacrifice that is acceptable to God. It is so much more difficult to hear the call of God when we are living on top of a mountain enjoying the fruit of the land.

This brings us to the first principle of revival: **Revival involves consecration to the Lord.** This principle was established in the desert at Mount Sinai before God came down in the sight of people. God instructed Moses to have the people consecrate themselves by washing their clothes, symbolic of cleansing from sin, and by abstaining from sexual relations, symbolic of putting their flesh to death (Exodus 19:10,11). Later on, the Law of Moses required people as well as things to be cleansed by blood, for without shedding of blood there was no forgiveness

(Exodus 29:21; Hebrews 9:22). Consecration was intended to prepare people for intimate encounters with God, and sacrifice of a goat by Gideon foreshadows Jesus' shedding His blood so we could be reconciled with God.

Encounters with God are never to be taken lightly. It is very humbling, especially when God breaks through deception that it is fine to continue doing what seems right in our own eyes. When Elijah called Elisha into the LORD's service, Elisha asked to say farewell to his parents. While doing so, he killed the oxen he used to plow and cooked the meat as a sacrifice, using the plowing equipment as firewood. Again shedding of blood was involved along with willingness to burn bridges behind, separating completely from his past as an act of consecration. So it also was with Gideon, and is meant for us today. Jesus tells us, *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62).

Gideon took the cooked meat and the unleavened bread and the broth in a pot to the LORD who told him, *"Take the meat and unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth."*

With the staff in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and bread,

and fire came out from the rock. At once, Gideon's offering was totally consumed.

Upon seeing this happen, Gideon exclaimed nervously, *"Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."*

And the LORD replied, *"Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die."*

Gideon understood the implication of what had just taken place. Under the Law of Moses, the priests frequently made what were called burnt offerings. When offerings were acceptable, fire came at times from the presence of the LORD to consume the entire offering. Gideon realized that he made an offering that was acceptable and was in the intimate presence of God. Gideon was quite startled, a rather common reaction in the Scriptures when one has a truly genuine encounter with Almighty God.

Isaiah had a vision of God's holiness and majesty and cried out, *"Woe to me! I am ruined!"* (Isaiah 6:5). Simon Peter fell to his knees, saying *"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"* (Luke 5:8). Soldiers coming to arrest Jesus at Gethsemene fell down to the ground in His presence (John 18:6). On our meeting the Holy One of Israel, there can be shocking awareness of evil in us along with the fear of judgment. My personal encoun-

ter with Jesus twenty years ago is as clear in my memory as if it took place yesterday. I was startled just like Gideon and so aware of sin in my life as well as recognizing the incredible love and mercy of God that was offering me eternal life.

Let us be certain to understand the picture illustrated here. It describes for us the response of Gideon to a call of God under the provisions of the covenant known as the Law of Moses. Gideon offers sacrifice to show commitment to God's call on his life. Today, Paul speaks of offering our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). Our very lives are to be a burnt offering, the old man put to death and left in ashes so Jesus might be manifest in and through us. This is our act of worship that is holy and pleasing to God, a God who desires our obedience and not a sacrifice of bulls and goats.

Gideon's preparing an offering also represents repentance. A person answering God's call in sincerity and truth cannot live the same way as before. This is why Jesus says we're to count the cost before deciding to follow His footsteps (Luke 14:25-32). *"Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple"* (14:33). Only a heart that is broken and contrite is able to

be molded and shaped on the wheel of the Potter. Sadly, today's preaching is flooded by a free-of-cost salvation that only needs to be accepted. It has the deceiving effect of giving people a false sense of security. Paul tells us to examine ourselves to see if we're really in the faith. Can we honestly say of ourselves, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"*? (Galatians 2:20).

On the other hand, we must be careful to not turn an act of consecration into the call of God. A sacrifice of self has nothing to do with the call of God other than the abandoning of self so that the call can be answered. Consecration is our decision to answer the call with an act of surrender. And martyrdom is the sacrifice acceptable to God, a dying of self so one might become broken bread and poured-out wine for sake of the gospel. It is a conscious, deliberate discarding of independence that comes by accepting the lordship of Jesus. No one can do this on our behalf. It was failure of the Pharisees to sign away their personal rights that led Jesus to expose them as nothing more than hypocrites...*religious frauds*.

Nothing less than our becoming the burnt offering satisfies the Lord. He desires

to be the complete authority over our lives: *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise"* (Psalm 51:17). It is not just that we have Jesus, but that He has us. Only then can Jesus manifest Himself in our life and reveal Himself through us so to touch others with love and power. Only as Jesus has us follow Him obediently will people say what they said about Peter and John over the power of God so evident in their lives: *"They have been with Jesus"* (Acts 4:13).

Jesus doesn't ask us to yield for the sake of giving things up. He wants us to give things up for what is truly worthwhile, which is life in Him. He wants us to discard the chains that hinder close fellowship. And to those who don't love Him, our obedience can be costly. It interferes with their plans. But we grieve the Spirit if we fail to answer God's call. Indeed, it is far easier to work for Jesus without having His vision for our life. In that way, we remain free to do what feels good to us and what our natural inclination would lead us to do with our life.

When we serve the Lord our own way instead of answering His call, our service is less likely to offend those who are living by worldly values. There certainly will be less demand on leisure time. There will be more

time to fish instead of being fishers of men, and more time to work on our golf handicap instead of helping handicapped people. But when God calls as He called Gideon, it's a different ballgame. We realize that we're not our own, but have been bought at a price. A person experiencing genuine revival finds himself in the grip of God, challenged to step forward to do what previously would have been unthinkable. "*Feed my sheep*" is no longer a choice to be made. It becomes a commission to fulfill.

Immediately after Gideon makes his acceptable offering, God reveals Himself as Jehovah-Shalom, which means *The LORD is Peace*. His offering had reflected repentance as well as faith, and opened the door for restoration of relationship. While mercy and grace of God cannot be earned, repentance is the responsibility of each individual. It is possible to confess sins without the intent to repent by changing behavior. In a biblical sense, however, confession is always linked to repentance in order to obtain forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47), just as salvation itself is linked to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

It is with his acceptable sacrifice that Gideon experiences peace, and the same is true today. Contrary to teaching springing

forth from New Age pulpits, neither the gift of eternal life nor revival can be experienced by one who is unwilling to repent and live in obedience to the teachings of Christ. God isn't looking for people to simply fill a great number of pews of Sunday mornings. He is calling us to be mighty warriors. Even when lost in the mire, He says, "*Your sins are forgiven.*" We don't fully understand all we're being saved from or called to revival for. We only know we're in need of spiritual renewal and that the new wine of the gospel can't be poured into the old wineskins representing our former way of life. Past ways cannot live in any harmony with the new life in Christ without causing a breaking or bursting.

Furthermore, our lives will only bear fruit out of yieldedness. Unless we're willing to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, we can not be formed into epistles of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Abraham was called out by God and came to possess the promises of God in believing and obeying. We become children of Abraham when we accept the lordship of Jesus over our lives. It is when we come to know Him intimately as Lord that we come to know Him as *The LORD is Peace*. Nothing is so lovely as to accept our helplessness and yield to Jesus. Life doesn't remain a matter of "*Thou shalt not's*" It changes into



“Your will is my delight!” and our desire is that Jesus be exalted in our lives.

When God calls a man out and takes a firm grip on him, he becomes more than a captive set free. In fact, he is bound again so that he only acts as God wills. *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price”* (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Victory will not come to those who refuse to leave a winepress and trust Jesus. One must be willing to place all on the altar as an offering: personal rights, ambitions, pride, dreams, greed, all types of addiction, unforgiveness, jealousy, love of the world, and any relationships not ordained by God. All these must be surrendered so that holy fire can consume everything that hinders a close personal relationship with Jesus.

Many are too reluctant to surrender personal agendas and lifestyles in order to make an acceptable offering like Gideon. It seems too costly to abandon self to Christ. Such persons fail to appreciate that the will of God is always best. As Jesus reclined at the table of Simon the Leper just a few days before His crucifixion, a sinful woman came with an alabaster jar of expensive perfume.

She broke the jar and poured the perfume on the head of Jesus to show her love and devotion (Mark 14:1-9). She recognized that her opportunity to show dedication to Jesus would soon be over, and Jesus ordained that her selfless act of sacrifice would be told whenever the gospel is preached.

Mary's act is a powerful example for today. We too must seize the moment while there is opportunity. Each of us must ask ourselves, "What is my alabaster jar that I can break and offer to Christ? What have I held onto for a long time, knowing it is not God's will for my life? Am I willing to offer it as a sacrifice, or has my heart become too hard? Each of us has been given free will regarding our personal alabaster jars. We can do exactly as we see fit. But lest we be deceived, our choice will have consequences that are eternal.

There were many occasions in the past when I sang words of an old familiar hymn: *"Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee; take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold; take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine; take my heart, it is Thine own, it shall be Thy royal throne."* These words have profound meaning, yet they were far from what

my actions were at the time. It is so easy to honor Christ with our lips, yet at the same time dishonor Him in our actions. I'd made a head decision to serve the Lord, but had not truly consecrated myself to His will in my heart by separating from the world.

Let us determine to sacrifice in a way that is acceptable to the Lord. His grace is more than sufficient for us to give up anything. It may involve a selfish attitude, or surrendering a lifelong ambition. For some, it may be turning from alcohol, drug abuse or pornography. It may require giving up a luxurious lifestyle for missions. No matter how great a sacrifice it may turn out to be, the reward will be infinitely greater. Such is a promise of Jesus Himself (Mark 10:29,30).

Anyone truly born of the Spirit never absorbs himself with houses, clothes, gold or worldly pleasures. If your priorities in life concern such things as these, let the Holy Spirit examine your heart to see if you are really in Christ. *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15). Scriptures such as this are not given emphasis in cafeteria-style churches across the land. Such churches are careful to avoid the whole counsel of God's Word.

Instead, they allow members to select their own spiritual diet based on worldly tastes and personal preferences.

Whenever we sincerely seek the Lord, there are always two seekers. Like the *“lost”* or prodigal son, we never need to fear that God will fail to find us if we truly seek Him. We could never become consecrated to God in the first place if Jesus hadn’t become an acceptable offering through His sacrificial atoning death. Many die of spiritual thirst today because they’ve not come to know the One who died so that no one might need to thirst again (John 4:14). But it was not that way with Matthew, a hated tax collector.

Matthew was busy enriching himself at the expense of fellow countrymen. Still Matthew was a seeker and Jesus knew that he was seeking. Jesus simply said, *“Follow me.”* Matthew instantly got up, left everything, and followed Jesus (Luke 5:27,28). A modest person, Matthew let others tell he was wealthy, owned a large house, and gave a great banquet for Jesus. It didn’t concern Matthew that he was leaving behind a life of comfort and material things. From now on, his thirst would be quenched like that of a Samaritan woman who had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus at Jacob’s well.

It is the promise of God that to as many as receive Jesus is given a right to be called the children of God. If you have never personally invited Jesus to enter your heart as Lord of your life, do this without delay. *"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near"* (Isaiah 55:6). Today is the day of salvation. Do not harden your heart if you are hearing the calling of God. You may never again hear His voice speak as clearly as you are hearing it today.

If you're a backslider, or if your walk is slightly weaker than it once was, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the cause. God tells us the obstacles in our spiritual life will be revealed: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him"* (James 1:5). Don't grieve the Holy Spirit by rejecting His sanctifying work. If you are aware of an alabaster jar that needs to be broken, do so at once. Your reward will be a fresh revelation of Jesus as *Prince of Peace*, and the old compelling love will be restored.

Why does Jesus make it a point to go to the Matthews of this world? It is because He knows we have need of Him. It is a need that is satisfied only when we are willing to make an acceptable sacrifice. We shortly

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will see that the light of Christ will brightly shine only out of vessels that are broken. It is as we break our alabaster jar that people come to say about each of us, *“That person has been with Jesus.”*

*“Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”* Romans 12:1

## *Chapter 4*

# Tearing Down Idols





## *Judges 6:25-32*

*That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.*

*So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.*

*In the morning when the men of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!*

*They asked each other, "Who did this?"*

*When they carefully investigated, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it."*

*The men of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down*

*Baal's altar and cut down the Asheroth pole beside it."*

*But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar. So on that day they called Gideon, "Jerub-Baal," saying "Let Baal contend with him," because he broke down Baal's altar.*

*Judges 6:25-32*

Gideon answered the call of God and consecrated himself with an acceptable sacrifice. By doing so, he committed himself to follow the LORD and experienced peace as a result of reconciliation. He is likely feeling somewhat as did Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, ready to enjoy the majesty of the moment for a season. But mountaintop experiences are not to be enjoyed permanently. Sooner or later, it is necessary to return to the valley and begin work prepared in advance by God. And so it is in the case of Gideon.

He at once finds himself challenged to tear down a Baal altar and Asherah pole belonging to his father. In addition, he is to burn a bull of his father's as a sacrifice to God. He is anxious about these instructions since both his family and people of the town have continued to worship idols despite their pleading for God to help them in their struggle against the Midianites. For some reason, they completely fail to see that it is idol worship that has caused God's hand of protection to be missing from their lives in the first place.

This brings us to a second principle of genuine revival: **Revival involves the removal of obstacles hindering spiritual growth.** Gideon had learned a bitter lesson

during the prior seven years, namely that nothing is so costly as disobedience to God. Therefore he determined to tear down the idols as God had commanded, but did so at night in hopes of avoiding detection. But the town men quickly learned that Gideon was responsible despite attempted secrecy. Their wrath was such that they insisted on Gideon's death as punishment, but his life was spared by his father's intercession.

Several lessons apply to our lives in this passage. One is the similarity to our own situation when adverse circumstances plague us. We will plead for intervention by God even as we refuse to turn from worldly behavior. If someone suggests that we must destroy our idols, we react with anger and resentment. But it is absolutely worship of Baal when we consider prosperity of more importance than piety, or look at happiness as more desirable than holiness. The same is true if we insist that personal rights must be permitted rather than submitting to the lordship of the Jesus we profess.

Economic prosperity has birthed any number of idols in America, including our insatiable love of money, greed for material possessions, excessive desire for creature comforts, and exalting of success in gaining positions of influence and power. Certainly

social acceptance is high on the list along with abuse of alcohol and drugs. Values of the world are constantly promoted by many types of advertising. Immoral lifestyles are paraded in public as a valid alternative to God's standard of heterosexual marriage. In fact homosexuality and lesbianism are even taught by some as preferable relationships.

A major cause of backsliding in the church is failure to tear down idols. This is partly the result of teaching that salvation can be gained without genuine repentance. There also is general failure to teach a need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in putting to death fleshly misdeeds to gain eternal life (Romans 8:13). Many who occupy pulpits are teaching a cheap grace and easy salvation, deceiving many into belief they are saved when they never had any intention to say goodbye to old ways and live as a redeemed people. This is exactly what the apostle is warning about by saying, *"in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons"* (1 Timothy 4:1).

The Word of God is very clear on this matter, however. For example, John writes, *"If we claim to have fellowship with [Jesus] yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not*

*live by the truth. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are. Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God” (1 John 1:6; 3:10). Scripture contains repeated warnings that those refusing to cooperate with the sanctifying work of the Spirit by tearing down idols in their life will not enjoy saving grace. It is the refusal to be sanctified that causes Jesus to ask those who profess His name yet rebel against His teachings, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46).*

Another lesson in this portion of the story concerns persecution for sake of the gospel. Tearing down idols is never without peril. In fact, Jesus guarantees that we’ll be persecuted (John 15:20) as does the apostle Paul: “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Faith must be tried by fire to have the power to stand up to rejection and ridicule. Persecution even comes from the members of one’s family (Matthew 10:36). No shortcut exists to going through trials for doing what is right in the eyes of God. God uses a furnace of affliction to refine us and drive us toward more complete dependence on Him (Isaiah 48:10). Simply said, affliction

is God's way of making us mighty warriors for the sake of His kingdom. Muscle of both the physical and spiritual type is developed most successfully by meeting resistance.

The persecution that is experienced by Gideon in tearing down idols is taking place with increasing frequency in our day, not only overseas but here in America. The resistance to the gospel is intense in those countries where the dominant population is Islamic or Hindu. Martyrdom is no longer a rarity, the slain numbering in the hundreds of thousands in these countries. Let us not be deceived about vicious militancy in these religions. A brief reading of the Koran will reveal hateful intolerance toward those who refuse to accept Allah and Muhammad, his messenger. Particular animosity is directed at those of Jewish and Christian faiths.

Another front of persecution comes from a world under control of Satan, called the god of this age by Paul and the prince of this world by Jesus. These present days are fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Paul warns that in the last days, people will be lovers of self, money and pleasure rather than lovers of God. How very closely the United States fits this description. The persecution by the media and in the workplace is increasingly

strong against those who witness for Christ. Education is teaching secular humanism and evolution, both in direct opposition to the gospel. Meanwhile, condoms are given out to students and prayer is increasingly forbidden by the courts, not only in schools but at public events.

Persecution also takes place when biblical Christianity confronts ritualistic or formal religion. Evangelicals have long been exposed to persecution in countries that are predominantly Catholic and Orthodox. In addition, persecution is common when the faithless ideology of those who don't accept the infallibility of Scripture is challenged. People may act polite initially, but reaction can quickly turn to hostility. In America, so much of the church is little except a form of godliness. There is widespread denial of the power of the cross to save those in a gutter of life, to heal medical incurables, to mend broken marriages, and to free those bound by addictions including homosexuality.

The purpose of tearing down idols is not human perfection, as stressed in some holiness movements. The purpose is rather that God might make us one with Himself. Only by tearing down idols and emptying of self can one be filled with the Holy Spirit.



Tearing down must begin inwardly with the most important idols of self-sufficiency and selfish ambition. We may have a very clear vision of what God has prepared for us to do, but reliance on our might and power is an idol that must be crushed before vision will become reality. Too often we are thinking like Moses when he saw his own people oppressed by Egyptian slavemasters. Then he considered it his personal responsibility to deliver them from bondage.

Before Moses could become a useful vessel for God, he needed humbling by forty years of feeding sheep in the desert. It was only after reaching a point of saying, *"Who am I, that I should go?"* was Moses molded into a person ready to walk the path chosen for him by an all-sufficient God. Some are choosing to work for God today but lack the power of God flowing in and through their lives. They are selecting both the task and the timing, and God's anointing doesn't rest on their effort. Unfortunately they ignore an important biblical admonition: *"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain"* (Psalm 127:1).

Holding to personal rights and taking offense when others fail to meet our expectations are idols that must be demolished

as quickly as possible. The same is true for the tendency to be critical as well as failing to take responsibility for one's own misery. It's an exception if people reach adulthood without having prejudices and idols that hinder the will of God. The refining work of the Holy Spirit that is called sanctification is needed to tear down these idols so we can become mighty warriors for the Lord. If we could appreciate the value of trials used to refine us, we would thank God for trials more than just about anything else in life.

Jesus is warning of idols in telling us about having spiritual life *"choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures"* (Luke 8:14). This warning is worth being repeated many times. If the world fails to distract us with concern about money, clothes, pleasures or having the approval of others, we're certain to encounter trying problems. Peter took his eyes off of Jesus, and allowed himself to be distracted by the waves and wind while he was walking on water. The result is that he began to sink. Pressing situations always compete with keeping our focus on the One who is the Answer to problems. Indeed, the purpose of trials that God permits to occur is never to crush or destroy us. Rather, the

purpose is to remove whatever might keep us from being a devoted bride for Christ.

The question facing each person who seeks a closer relationship with Jesus is, *"Am I willing to tear down idols in my life?"* All of us have areas that need to be placed on the altar as a sacrifice. The response of Jesus to the three men in Luke 9 may seem strange when He challenged their sincerity to follow Him. But Jesus knew *"what was in a man"* (John 2:25). He was aware that each of these men had idols that would hinder relationship with Him. One cannot expect pleasant circumstances in service to the Lord (Luke 9:58), nor can one put loyalty to family ahead of personal loyalty to Jesus (Luke 9:60). The calling of God will never be answered when we say, *"I will go, but..."* (Luke 9:61).

Even good things must be torn down at times to reap the very best that God has for us. Our flesh will rebel against tearing down idols with the fury of a raging sea. Human nature makes excuses, finds ways to delay and invents justification of all sorts when the Holy Spirit pricks the conscience. It would be much easier were our flesh not so resistant to discipline, but such isn't the case. This is why the kindness of God finds

it necessary to put us into a furnace of affliction to refine us (Isaiah 48:10). Only when we are willing to smash idols will we stop conforming to the ways of the world and empty ourselves. Then filling with the Holy Spirit becomes possible and the character of Jesus can be formed in us.

Paul writes, *“If a man cleanses himself from [idols], he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work”* (2 Timothy 2:21). Cleansing referred to here involves dying to self, giving up rights to do as we see fit, and surrendering dreams and ambitions in order to be guided by heaven. It includes giving up all right to understand why trials take place, accepting that testing of faith is to be viewed joyfully as it serves to develop perseverance. Many have yet to reach this level of maturity, but revival will not become reality until they determine to declare war on the idols in their own lives.

A failure to stress tearing down idols places today's church in a position of weakness. Were this not true, one wouldn't see so much divorce, depression, addiction, and worldliness in the body of Christ. To those willing to destroy idols, God promises to give everything needed to live a godly life

and escape the corruption in the world that is caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:3,4). And it isn't enough to just tear down idols. We're to build proper altars to the Lord as Gideon was commanded. We're called on to replace what previously absorbed our time, talent and treasures with kingdom business under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

It is vitally important to develop total dependence on guiding of the Holy Spirit. In speaking to the disciples about His return to heaven, Jesus promised they'd not be left as orphans. He said a "*Counselor*" would be sent. The original Greek is the *parakletos*, a word used exclusively in New Testament writings to refer to the Holy Spirit. It means one who comes alongside to counsel, guide, strengthen, comfort, teach and encourage. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to do all things in accord with the purposes of God (Philippians 2:13).

At times, the Spirit will use others to assist our walk with Jesus. Gideon took ten men to help him tear down idols. We also are meant to seek the prayers and help of brothers in Christ whenever difficult trials arise. Pride causes us to not be transparent and leads us to say, "I can't talk about it" or "I'm doing fine" when our world is falling to

pieces all around us. People too often wear masks when they're filled with despair, but it isn't possible to act like Lone Ranger and be victorious. This is especially true when dealing with idols that have been strongholds such as addictions. Support of others mature in the faith and making oneself accountable to them is of great value in dealing with life-controlling issues.

Gideon's father stepping forward to protect his son is a type of the Holy Spirit in times of extremity. He will never forsake us, as our bodies are the temples in which He dwells. It is always the Holy Spirit at work, whether through advice coming by a godly friend, a pulpit message, inspiration during prayer or while meditating on Scripture. If we seek the face of God earnestly and turn forcefully from our flesh, the Holy Spirit will bring us to a place where we continually dwell in the secret place of the Most High. There our lives will constantly manifest the life and power of Christ, becoming a strong witness to others.

Nothing less than this is the desire of God. There is no path to spiritual growth or revival that doesn't involve taking personal inventory and purging of idols from our life. There must be a determined effort to seek

the kingdom of God and His righteousness above all else. It's not enough to have good intentions. There must be action. Our past idolatrous ways cannot exist in harmony with being a new creation in Jesus Christ. Anyone in Christ **is** a new creation; the old **has gone** and the new **has come** (2 Corinthians 5:17). Idols can never be purified or redeemed. They must be destroyed without mercy, lest they destroy us.

What idols do you worship? I find it necessary to always remind myself of words written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit: *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). A key step in most programs used for recovery from addictions is making a searching and fearless moral inventory of self. It is difficult to imagine a more useful piece of advice for a church in America that has become spiritually complacent in recent decades. The scriptures give serious warning about deception in these end times. We must diligently heed words of the psalmist: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart... see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"* (Psalm 139: 23,24). Oh that we might allow the sword of God's Word to daily judge the thoughts and

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attitudes of our hearts and help us identify idols in our lives that need to be torn down.

*“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”*

2 Corinthians 7:1



## *Chapter 5*

# Empowered For War



## *Judges 6:33-44*

*Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh calling them to arms, and also in Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.*

*Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised – look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew – a bowlful of water.*

*Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." That night God did so. Only the*

*fleece was dry; all the ground was  
covered with dew.*

Two things had to take place before the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon to empower him. The first was consecration to the LORD with an offering that was symbolic of repentance...*turning away* from worldly ways and *turning to* God by offering self as a living sacrifice. The second was the tearing down of idols, symbolic of being willing to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work of removing anything that hinders the life of Christ in a believer. It is a wonderful thing when we face the hypocrisy in our life and make a decision to turn our will totally over to God after having counted the cost.

The Spirit of the LORD coming upon Gideon is a *type* of what Jesus refers to as baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). And the Scriptures state that this baptism depends on willingness to obey God (Acts 5:32). We must be ready to remove all that impedes a life of holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1). Hearts are only suitable for filling with the Spirit if we turn away from a self-centered attitude, greed, bitterness, immorality and the indulging of flesh with impure behavior (Galatians 5:19-21).

Having the Spirit of the LORD come on a person is more than having the power

of God manifest in one's life. It also means the Holy Spirit has more control over those He empowers. One doesn't have to pray for the Spirit to come down because He already is here. He simply hasn't come upon many in the church because He is waiting for us to give Him control of our lives. His desire is to move us into a place where communion with Jesus is much more intimate. In the absence of this baptism, we tend to be filled with head knowledge while lacking wisdom and revelation that creates in us compelling desire to live by the Spirit in order to please the Lord (Ephesians 1:17; Galatians 5:16).

Empowering for service is hindered by anything that competes with our loyalty to Christ. Nothing hinders God's fulfilling His vision in us like self-sufficiency. Vision is birthed by God and we are to wait for His timing for the vision to become reality. The premature coupling of Abraham and Hagar illustrates what can happen when we listen to worldly advice instead of waiting for God. Abraham had to wait another thirteen years for his self-sufficiency to be so abolished that he would no longer lean on his own understanding. It can be so very difficult at times to stop trusting in our flesh and avoid getting ahead of God.

Often we say, "I better get started or this vision of mine will never take place." When such thinking develops, we're to take that thought captive without delay. Having a relationship with Jesus is not born of the flesh, but of the Spirit as a work of God. If we want to keep the relationship fresh, and avoid staleness that results in backsliding, we must be careful to not draw our life from any source other than God Himself. Staying filled to overflowing with love for Jesus isn't automatic. We're responsible for having the Word of God abide in us daily and for abiding in Christ with persevering prayer and obedient love. Only through such abiding will our life bear abundant fruit (John 5:14).

Empowered, Gideon demonstrates a very important biblical truth for us. Once *"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 5:5), our concern is to be about the Father's business. Gideon blows a trumpet to call others to join him in battle against the enemy so they can live in peace. It will also be our burning desire to share the glorious riches of Christ once we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Paul spent his entire life with a single purpose in mind, that as broken bread and pour-out wine he might win others to Christ. That'll

be our motivation as well when filled with the Spirit. Some may think we've gone stark raving mad, but our desire will be to please God rather than seek the approval of men.

Service in the army of the Lord is to be an overflow of filling with the Holy Spirit. It isn't possible to be the complete soldier Jesus desires without first being clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1: 4,5,8). Service is most effective and pleasing to God when it reflects the nature of Christ, and that nature cannot exist separate from the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ, and that fruit is never a product of our own flesh.

The sequence of events ordained for our lives is as it was for Gideon. The first step is hearing the call of God, followed by consecration with the act of offering self will as an acceptable sacrifice and placing our faith in Jesus Christ. The next step involves being willing to tear down idols that hinder fellowship with God. This prepares a heart for empowering by baptism with the Holy Spirit and thereafter remaining filled with the Spirit. In this way, our service to God is never a matter of striving or frustration, but flows out of love and devotion for the Jesus we profess as the Lord of our lives.



Anointed by the Spirit, Gideon is not the same person. Now obedience is the only need for victory over the enemy. This brings us to a third principle of genuine revival: **Revival brings obedience birthed by love for the Lord.** True revival always gives rise to a sincere desire to do that which pleases Jesus. It is desire that springs forth from a heart grateful for God's mercy and grace. Peter refers to believers as "*God's elect*" who are "*chosen...for obedience to Jesus Christ*" (1 Peter 1:1,2). Obedience to the Holy Spirit's guiding hand is the only way for believers to enjoy a victorious life. Nothing has changed since the LORD Almighty told us that victory comes, "*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit*" (Zechariah 4:6).

Gideon blows the trumpet to call for assembly of armed men and people respond as they often do to those whose lives are manifesting the presence of God. However, only 32,000 gather to fight a massive army of the enemy numbering 135,000 men. This army of Midianites is a *type* or symbol of the many foes aligned today against Spirit-filled Christians. Such believers are familiar with rejection, smears on their reputation, the loss of fellowship with friends who are satisfied with lukewarm religion, and the

constant attack of Satan's demonic forces. Other enemies include political, economic and education forces that cooperate closely with the media in virtually every sphere of daily life. And a very dangerous enemy in these present times is secular humanism.

Humanism claims that it is possible to change behavior through human wisdom and psychology. It teaches that standards of morality are relative instead of absolute, and totally rejects the idea of a Sovereign God. Humanism claims that man's highest good can be achieved by pleasure and self-fulfillment rather than by obedience to our Creator. It fits nicely with the dilute gospel of compromise heard in so many churches today. The enemy army also includes those who preach a so-called 'positive gospel' that strips the 'good news' of Jesus Christ of its demand for repentance and holy living.

The Midianite army is also symbolic of the flesh. This is simple to recognize in those who are bound by addiction, but conflict with the flesh exists in a wide variety of situations. It may be obvious to those living in prosperity that God is calling them to be mighty warriors, but fear over what it may be necessary to sacrifice can prevent such a person from yielding to the will of God. In

fact, the greatest fleshly battle of all may be for those who have never been corrupted by the profanity of life. They may not realize that their self-righteousness is as filthy rags to God (Isaiah 64:6). Self-righteousness is so crippling a disease that it led Jesus to tell Pharisees, *"Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you"* (Matthew 21:31).

Revival comes by realizing we are completely outnumbered by the enemy and that spiritual growth and security is under attack. The Holy Spirit must reveal our forbidden covenants with the enemy and the spiritual compromise in our lives. The Spirit of the LORD will never rest on those refusing to humble themselves and cry out to God, seeking His face and repenting of failure to deny self and take up crosses. We must be careful to resist the temptation to gird self against the two-edged sword of God's Word, instead allowing it to pierce us and perform spiritual surgery on our souls. A tender conscience that permits the Holy Spirit to perform His sanctifying work in our hearts is one of the most precious blessings we will ever possess by the grace of God.

The fleece story holds fascination for me, especially since we so often profess that

nothing is impossible for God. Yet we tend to lean on our own understanding and limit what we really believe God can do. But this is not the case with Gideon. He confidently asks for a sign that he will be used to save Israel: *"I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I know that you will save Israel by my hand as you have said."* Then he asks for the process to be reversed in utter faith that God is quite capable of doing such a supernatural act.

God does exactly as Gideon requests, and He often encourages us as well. I often have found myself given confirmation in the most remarkable ways as described in my testimony, ***Hooked on Hope***. It is time for us to stop allowing our finite thinking to question the power of God. So often we tend to say, "God just can't help my situation!" Then off we go to see the doctor, dentist, psychiatrist or divorce lawyer.

Gideons aren't satisfied with a gospel stripped of the miraculous. Spiritual growth and revival will not come to those who are content with religion emptied of Holy Spirit power. *"The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power"* (1 Corinthians 4:20). The power exists today to save anyone from the gutter-most to the uttermost, to heal any

who are sick with any disease and to deliver those under demonic oppression. Those in the kingdom are intended to do more than deliver the good news of Jesus Christ. A person filled with the Spirit will not only live a righteous life (2 Peter 1:3). He will also manifest spiritual gifts as the Holy Spirit determines to bless and edify others in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

When the Spirit of the LORD comes on us, He reveals our position in Christ and it no longer matters if millions are against us. *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31). When facing enemies, we no longer dwell on the circumstances because we are anointed with the same Spirit of power that was upon Jesus. To claim that miraculous power is no longer given to the church by God is to teach a myth just as the scriptures say will happen in these last days (2 Timothy 3:5; 4:3,4). Those who teach this myth lack the power for spiritual gifts in their own lives, so they teach that what they lack does not exist. That is nothing but falsehood! It makes Satan delighted when such error is being taught in our churches.

When God uses men in extraordinary ways, He anoints them by putting the Spirit

of the LORD upon them. In Old Testament days, this anointing took place for selected purposes using selected persons like kings, prophets and judges. Today God is fulfilling a promise to pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28). Baptism with the Holy Spirit is no longer limited to a few: *"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call"* (Acts 2:39). Many persons have shown remarkable power to confirm the gospel by the miraculous over the years, some never trained in faithless traditional schools of religion. Smith Wigglesworth, F. Bosworth, Kathryn Kuhlman and Dwight Moody all received their ordination with power of the Holy Spirit that more than compensated for any lack of formal theological education.

There is the erroneous belief that one receives all the Holy Spirit has to give at the time of conversion. This doctrine paralyzes some denominations and stems from failure to recognize a difference between indwelling of the Spirit in (Greek *en*) believers and the empowering when the Holy Spirit comes on (Greek *epi*) believers. The first disciples had indwelling take place on the evening of the resurrection when Jesus breathed on them, saying *"Receive the Holy Spirit"* (John 20:22).

Contrary to teaching by some, the church is birthed at this time and NOT at Pentecost. When Pentecost took place fifty days later, a blood bought, born again church received its empowering through baptism in the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-17).

A similar time gap between believing (being indwelt by the Spirit) and empowering (being baptized with the Spirit) is again seen in Samaria. Those in Samaria believed Philip as he preached the gospel and were baptized in water. But the Holy Spirit didn't come on (epi) them until later when Peter and John arrived (Acts 8:12-17). In similar fashion, Paul didn't receive filling (baptism) with the Holy Spirit until Ananias came to pray and lay hands on him (Acts 9:17).

This disconnect between believing in Christ and experiencing filling with the Holy Spirit needs to be recognized. It's not biblical to say that "you get it all at once" when born again. As a result of false teaching, the power of God as manifested in spiritual gifts like prophecy, miracles, and healing is not in evidence in many churches. It robs a body of believers of blessings provided by a loving heavenly Father to strengthen and to edify His children on earth. The church is left weakened, unable to deal with works of

the flesh and Satan that interfere with our having a more abundant life in Christ.

Lukewarm believers and backsliders so commonly find themselves threatened by the idea of filling or baptism with the Holy Spirit. This is because the Holy Spirit will at once challenge the right for a person to live as he chooses. The Spirit does not empower a person to stay the same. One is compelled by the Spirit to demolish idols and deny self for the sake of God's kingdom. No longer is he able to stay like the fig tree Jesus cursed because it had plenty of leaves but no fruit. This is the picture of many who occupy the pews of a church on a given Sunday. They are dressed nicely, bring their bibles, and place money in the church treasury as did the Pharisees. But they fail to witness with effectiveness and rarely if ever bring the lost and hurting to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

Empowering by the Holy Spirit has a primary purpose of revealing Jesus **to** us, **in** us, and **through** us. The Holy Spirit rolls back the fog to reveal Jesus and His will to us in a very intimate way. Carnal things are then steadily dethroned as the Spirit does a sanctifying work (Romans 8:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Lives become transformed by the



Spirit into living epistles and those filled by the Spirit experience joy unspeakable and full of glory. As this takes place, one's life blesses others to the glory of the Father in heaven. God desires to fill us with the same power that anointed Jesus so that we may be brought forth as pure gold and become instruments for those good works planned by God in advance when we were saved by His grace (Ephesians 2:10).

Believers seeking a closer walk with Jesus and increased power in their witness are most likely to fail to receive baptism in the Spirit at the point of surrendering self will. There are two sides to empowerment. One is possessing the baptism, the second allowing the Holy Spirit to possess us more completely. Jesus tells that we will become witnesses when the Holy Spirit comes on us (Acts 1:8). The Greek translated as witnesses is the word *martus* from which the English martyr is derived. It is in dying to self and being willing to surrender all for Christ that one's witness gains increasing power. And here is the obstacle to becoming a modern day Gideon. The obstacle is unwillingness to give up personal rights in order that the will of Christ might be carried out.

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Jesus' desire is to empower us to be *mighty warriors* for His sake. This demands that we become rooted in faith, consecrated to serving Him, and be willing to allow the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to refine us. Once we sacrifice self will and prepare to have any idols removed from our lives, Jesus is so eager and ready to provide the empowering that will change our lives and bring revival, not only to us but through us to others.

When the conditions have been met, which is our responsibility, then Jesus tells us to keep on asking, seeking and knocking until we become endued with power (Luke 11:9,10). When that takes place, we will be ready to join His army as mighty warriors who are prepared for battle.

*"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*      Luke 11:13

## *Chapter 6*

# An Army is Chosen



## *Judges 7:1-8*

*Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.*

*But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go.*

*So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "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 the*

*mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.*

*The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place. So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents, but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.*

*Judges 7:1-8*

Here we find Gideon with his troops camped near the spring of Harod directly to the south of the enemy. Empowered by the Spirit of the LORD and confident of victory, Gideon is prepared to engage the enemy in spite of being heavily outnumbered. To his surprise, however, the LORD says, *"You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands."* God didn't want to risk having the Israelites boast they had gained victory by their own strength. To prevent this, God decided to reduce their army to such a size that no question would ever exist as to who was responsible for the victory.

This story illustrates an eternal truth that spiritual victories are never won by the might or strength of men. God doesn't need large numbers to accomplish deeds on His behalf. A few consecrated men filled with the Spirit spread the gospel throughout the civilized world in the first century, and no change has occurred since. Revivals always have resulted from the Holy Spirit working through a few dedicated people seeking God for fresh faith and power in an attitude of repentance, consecration, and obedience. It is only in this kind of climate that the hand of God creates revival. Indeed, revival is the

work of God, and the only role for men is to create a favorable atmosphere.

The LORD told Gideon, *"Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back."* At once, twenty-two thousand men without serious commitment to God's plan departed the site of impending battle. It is sad that such fear existed about danger for the sake of righteousness, but again little has changed over the ages. Were a similar test applied today, many church pews in America would empty along with some pulpits as well. As a result, however, the church would most certainly find itself strengthened and able to present a more effective witness to the world.

In choosing an army, God is looking for those who clearly understand the cross. There is no other way a person can ever be reconciled with a just God who loves righteousness but hates sin. Some persons are born with a sympathetic disposition but are unable to really help others because their human approach ignores God. Soldiers that God seeks will expose sin in love and present Jesus as the Son of God crucified for their salvation. We must never be afraid to apply the Sword of the Spirit during our speaking to others or to use the scriptures in a loving and discerning way.



Although only ten thousand Israelite soldiers remained, God felt there were still too many. So He ordered Gideon to take the men to the spring at En Harod. *"I will sift them for you there."* At the spring nearly all men knelt down on their knees to drink. Setting aside their weapons, they devoted full attention to satisfying thirst. In sharp contrast, three hundred men cupped water in their hands and brought their hands up to their mouths to lap the water with their tongues. By drinking in this manner, they were able to do two things: first, they kept their eyes focused on their leader; secondly, they remained fully alert for any possible approach of the enemy.

Similar sifting took place among the disciples of Jesus as well. With passage of time, His teaching presented problems for many disciples, including teaching that the *"flesh counts for nothing"* (John 6:63). As a result, *"many disciples turned back and no longer followed him"* (6:66). Then following the resurrection, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred disciples at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). However, only 120 of these felt it was important to wait for the *"gift"* of His Father that Jesus calls being *"baptized with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 1:4,5). Therefore

only a fraction of the disciples seem to have been clothed with power from on high, but what powerful witnesses for the gospel they would eventually become.

**The seventh verse of the seventh chapter in the seventh book of the Bible tells who God chooses for His army.** *“The LORD said to Gideon, ‘With the three hundred men that lapped, I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place.’”* These three hundred are a type or illustration of those God has chosen as soldiers over the ages and is choosing for His army in these final days. They represent those persons careful to remain alert against the world, the flesh, and the devil. They have a disciplined life of prayer, study and meditate regularly on the Word of God, and are continually watchful to avoid hindrances that detour a person from closely following Christ. So grateful for His mercy and grace, they obey Jesus out of deep love and devotion.

The *Three Hundred* hold a steady course during life's storms. And instead of waiting for revival to happen in one kind of way or another, they earnestly seek to fulfill the conditions of the heart that make true

revival likely. They do not waver in the face of opposition by friend or foe, and are even willing to endure alone in midst of a family circle that rejects their consecration. The *Three Hundred* are diligent to seek the face of God and move as the Spirit directs, more concerned about God's reputation than the approval of men. They submit their lives to the lordship of Christ, irrespective of the cost, their purpose in life being that Jesus is reflected in their character and that His will be accomplished in their lives.

This army of *Three Hundred* exists in various places throughout the world where people earnestly yearn to experience revival in the darkness of these days. The soldiers realize it is a serious thing to be stationary in one's relationship with the Lord instead of moving from glory to glory. They refuse to slip into the compromise and complacency of these days and are willing to accept rebuke by departing from churches that fail to be faithful to the gospel (Revelation 18:4). They take seriously a warning about trying to keep zeal for things of the Lord while in the midst of those who are lukewarm. As Paul warns us, "*Bad company corrupts good character*" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

His willingness to be "*poured out like a drink offering*" for the sake of the gospel

caused Paul to rejoice (Philippians 2:17). This must be our attitude if our desire is to be in the army of *Three Hundred* used by God for special purposes. It requires submission to godly discipline, allowing the refiner's fire to melt us and mold us according to the will of God. A prayer of Paul for the Thessalonians applies to every one of Jesus' true soldiers today: "*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless...*" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). A person isn't able to serve faithfully in His army without being made so at one with Jesus that the cost of serving is no longer of any concern.

Indeed this army consists only of the soldiers who hunger and thirst after righteousness, seeking to have a continual filling by the Spirit. They crave having a manifest presence of Christ in their lives, rest in His strength and comfort during their times of trial, and serve as inspiration to those who are burdened by doubt or weak in resolve. Some of these soldiers were once half-hearted, but now have become *flames of fire* with a burden for the lost. More than anything else, they desire to be used to bring in a harvest of souls. And they do not mistakenly strive in their own strength. Instead,

they realize that it is the Holy Spirit who works in them to will and act in accord with the purposes of God (Philippians 2:13).

Soldiers that Jesus is seeking are the believers who “*walk in the light as he is in the light*” (1 John 1:7). They recognize there is a worldly spirit in the church today with its conforming to the activities, amusement and values of the world. It’s evident to them that many church attenders are not simply lukewarm, but are failing to prepare for the coming of the bridegroom. Those walking in the light do not focus on having things done for them. Rather, they want to be receptive to what God desires to do in and through them. Because of this focus, it seems in the eyes of others that common sense has very little guiding role in the decisions they are making.

Scripture tells us that God is a “*consuming fire*” (Hebrews 12:29). The twenty-two thousand in the army of Gideon who turned back in fear are a *type* of believers who are unwilling to have God burn up the dross in their life. And those whose only concern at the spring was to satisfy thirst are a *type* of those who lack spiritual discipline and have not learned to be content in any situation. Satisfying fleshly appetites is their priority

instead of seeking to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. They have no zeal for revival and fail to press forward to win the prize for which God has called men heavenward in Christ (Philippians 3:13,14). Sadly, these two types constitute a rather large fraction of those who profess to know Christ today in America.

Jesus describes people such as these in several parables. In a parable about the sower and the seed, He speaks of those who are like seed falling on rocky soil. *"They receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away"* (Luke 8:13). The parable of ten virgins tells how a significant portion of the church will not be persevering when Jesus returns to gather His bride (Matthew 25:1-13). John tells us some Jewish leaders believed Jesus but refused to confess their faith out of fear they'd be put out of the synagogue. They loved the praise of men more than they desired the praise of God (John 12:42,43).

During times of spiritual awakening when a wind of revival is blowing, some will remain unaffected or only have a temporary ardor for godly matters. It is possible to be where God is pouring out His Spirit and

miss the blessing. Ananias and Sapphira lived in a time of great spiritual awakening, yet failed to participate. They made a vow to God that they didn't keep by withholding a portion of proceeds from a sale of property. It seems that they wanted to protect their interests in the event the Jesus' movement didn't succeed. In the same manner today, many in the church are reluctant to trust God and continue to stay soulless; they hold back in making wholehearted commitments to obey the calling of Christ.

The soldiers chosen by God for His *Three Hundred* are a sharp contrast. They submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and allow Him to do spiritual surgery using His sword...the Word of God. They participate in boot camp gladly, confessing sins to one another and permitting the refiner's fire to melt and mold them. While the lukewarm tremble in fear at the thought of refining, true soldiers choose to attend the training camps where there are no false prophets who teach doctrines that tickle itching ears. They understand that God isn't able to save a man through his mind, but only through a heart that is broken and contrite.

By reducing Gideon's army to a mere three hundred, there would never be doubt

as to who deserved credit for victory in the battle. God is never willing to yield His glory to another (Isaiah 48:11). Now the Israelites would be certain to ascribe to the Lord all of the glory due His Name. The same is true of every spiritual awakening. Revival comes as a Sovereign God chooses to work by grace through persons He anoints with power of the Holy Spirit. These are people who have a sincere burden for lost souls as shown by their willingness to *touch lepers* in society as was the custom of their Lord. Always ready to be used, they are spiritually alert and prepared to make any kind of sacrifice in the obedience that comes from their faith (Romans 1:5).

Any idea we can live in victory by our own ability or strength is a major hindrance to revival. Only by humbling self does God lift us up as soldiers and accomplish what can only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit (James 4:10). Victorious living in the economy of God always depends upon the abandoning of self and submission to the will of God. We're to say, *"If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that"* (James 4:15). Often we boast of our own plans and merits despite being told that such boasting is evil (4:16). Whatever we do in life should



be done as one who finds himself totally overwhelmed by the grace of our God: *“For Christ’s love compels us”* (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Some who would like to play a role in the Lord’s army are unable to operate with divine power in their life. It is when we are willing to lose our lives and allow Christ to reign on the throne of our heart that we live in the place chosen for us. We can’t be used of God by making an effort to be holy. Only God changes hearts and brings us to where we are holy without knowing it, where we live and move in the Spirit without thinking about it, and where nothing seems natural except having the will of God be our delight. It was such a place for the apostle Paul who wasn’t concerned with how people looked at him or what they thought, just as long as he could share the story of Christ crucified.

When one is sent to battle, he must be sent by the crucified Christ just as Jesus Himself was sent by His Father in heaven. Such a soldier is equipped with the Spirit of the LORD upon them and the armor of God in place. Victory occurs when we realize the battle is the Lord’s and that He alone must choose those to serve in any given battle. A need for evangelism is not sufficient reason to enter battle in the absence of being given

directions by God. For success in the battle, soldiers must be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and then act obediently in simple child-like faith.

A necessary condition for selection in the band of *Three Hundred* is a persevering attitude. *“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”* (James 1:4). Victory in battle and bringing revival to the land is not a task for the impatient or faint-hearted. It is through persevering in denial of self and by resisting temptation for self-indulgence that keeps a soldier consecrated for service. This involves determination to place every bit of self on the altar in desire for complete sanctification, *“perfecting holiness out of reverence for God”* (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Assurance for remaining in the band of *Three Hundred* is produced by keeping filled with the Spirit. One must not forget the fate of Paul's coworker Demas. Allowing love for this world to regain control of his heart, he eventually deserted Paul and the ministry. One must not give Satan an open door by failing to persevere in prayer and in study and meditation on God's Word. It also should be obvious that one must constantly resist appetites of the flesh. And as soldiers

find themselves in the heat of battle, they must not forget that God does His very best work in valleys and not on mountaintops. As trials become severe as often is the case, persevering soldiers rejoice instead of sinking into despair, knowing that the testing of their faith has a divine purpose.

Today is a day of decision...and there are only two options. To not choose either is making a decision, whether we realize it or not. One option is choosing to join the army of *Three Hundred*. The other choice is to not join. Jesus says many are invited but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14). Increasingly this seems to be true in these final days. Many church members prefer to join the fearful “*twenty-two thousand*” and hurry home to a life of comfort without any risk of sacrifice. If given a chance to participate in a revival, they will be half-hearted at the very most. Meanwhile, others will decide to serve their flesh by continually indulging in worldly pleasures rather than enlisting in the army of the *Three Hundred*.

The latter two groups are referred to as *lukewarm* by Jesus and stand in danger of being rejected for their lack of genuine commitment to the Lord (Revelation 3:16). In contrast, the faithful choose to endure the

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refining trials of boot camp and overcome a temptation to resist genuine repentance. In response to being called, they place self will on the altar as an acceptable offering. They deliberately destroy idols to remove what might interfere with training for warfare. In welcoming the Holy Spirit, who keeps their garden watered in the midst of widespread spiritual drought, they ready themselves for commissioning in the Lord's special forces as a member of company *Three Hundred*.

*"Cursed is the one who trusts in man,  
who depends on flesh for his strength  
and whose heart turns away from the  
LORD. But blessed is the man who  
trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is  
in him."* Jeremiah 17:5,7

# Chapter 7

## Battle is The Lord's



## Judges 7:16-24

*Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.*

*"Watch me," he told them. "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'"*

*Gideon and the three hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.*

*When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manessah were called out, and they pursued the Midianites. Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah."*

*So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they took the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah. They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was at the Jordan.*



Following instructions given by the LORD, Gideon divided the soldiers into three companies and gave each man a trumpet together with an empty jar to hold a torch. Gideon told them to surround the enemy camp, blow their trumpets, and smash jars with torches inside. Next the story explains what God will accomplish in broken vessels through whom He can pour His grace. It is out of broken *"jars of clay"* (2 Corinthians 4:6,7) that the light of Jesus Christ shines brightly in the darkness and is able to bring revival to spiritually dead churches.

Gideon's men positioned themselves around the enemy camp and sounded their trumpets. Smashing the jars with torches inside, they shouted as instructed. Not one held a weapon of war in his hand such as a sword or spear, yet the LORD caused the enemy to panic and turn on one another with their own swords. The Midianites then fled in terror and eventually a total of 120,000 of their swordsmen were struck down. It was centuries later that the psalmist wrote God makes His servants into *"flames of fire"* (Psalm 104:4). How true it was for this little band of three hundred men.

The army of Gideon fought with the sword of the Spirit by obeying the word of God. When the Lord sends us into battle, it is not nearly so important for us to know in advance what we're to do as to be faithful in our service to Him who knows the end from the beginning. This remarkable victory took place in the face of incredible odds, showing how the battle is the Lord's and victory will be ours when we submit to an all-powerful God. David realized this in facing the giant Goliath: *"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defiled. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give all of you into our hands"* (1 Samuel 17:45,47; underlining mine).

Moses also saw divine intervention in a battle against Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16). As long as his hands were lifted in prayer to heaven, the army of Israel was winning. But whenever Moses lowered his hands, the Amalekites began to win. At this time, God revealed Himself to Moses as *Jehovah Nissi*, which means *'The LORD is my Banner.'* In the same way, Jesus Christ moves on our

behalf when we depend on the sword of the Spirit. Scripture is filled with stories that illustrate the principle that victory is ours if we know the battle belongs to the Lord and submit to His leading. God and His ways are surrounded by clouds and thick darkness, and it is our responsibility to walk in faith. That is the way of the righteous in the sight of God (Galatians 3:11).

By relying on weapons having divine power, we will have victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. For some this is so difficult to learn after living in Egypt for so much of our life and fighting with weapons of the world. But the psalmist tells us how battles are won by the army of God: *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God”* (Psalm 20:7). We may suffer bitter defeats in trying to gain victory in our own might before we realize that no weapon forged against us will prosper if we place trust in God as our deliverer, banner, shield and strong tower. It is in abandoning self and allowing Christ to become our total sufficiency that we discover at last the fullness of our inheritance and begin to live in continuous victory.

The winds of revival will not come by any means other than crying out to God in

repentance as the Holy Spirit begins to stir our conscience and bring godly sorrow over the compromise and sinfulness in our lives. This isn't sorrow for having made mistakes and now having to suffer the consequences. It is sorrow caused by an awareness of our transgression against a holy and righteous God. For when godly sorrow is genuine, we grieve over disobedience and realize that we must die to everything in our life that is not pleasing in the sight of God. Anything less than this is spiritual fraud, or hypocrisy as it is more commonly called in Scripture.

The prescription has been written and medicine is available for revival today. But many of us are like the Hebrews in the days of judges. The last verse in the book of Judges says, *"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."* A great many who profess Jesus today refuse to accept Him as King. Greek *kyrios* translated as *"Lord"* literally means having complete ownership and authority. But Jesus does not reign that way in most of our lives. We are eager to accept Jesus as our personal Savior, but submitting to lordship is harder to swallow. In fact, the idea causes serious indigestion for many who profess Christ.

Much of the time we do exactly as we see fit like the Hebrews. We want to have

Jesus as a *resident* in our heart, but rebel against allowing Him to reign as *president*. Instead, we take up the sword and end up perishing by the sword as the same issues continue to plague us year after year. It reminds me of a story about a boat sailing across the ocean into the wide mouth of the Amazon river where land is still not visible on either side. Drinking water was gone and some had collapsed from dehydration while other sailors were fainting. As a ship came in their direction from the west, an urgent request was made for drinking water.

The reply was shouted back, "Throw buckets over the side! You're in the mouth of the river! The water is not salty!"

Unaware of location, the crew did not realize they were in a place where fresh water flowed into the ocean. A rather similar situation exists in the church today. Many of us are unaware of our position as seated in the heavenly realms with Christ. Some are fainting while others are collapsing from spiritual thirst, unaware a river of grace is flowing from the throne in heaven at Jesus' expense. Spiritual riches called grace have been fully paid for by His sacrificial death, yet so many suffer from a lack of power, joy and peace in their lives. They are failing to

take advantage of the grace that is available to every person who is truly in Christ.

In their victory over the Midianites, the weapons used by Gideon's army were foolish through worldly eyes: just trumpets and jars containing torches. But such was the command of God. The major reason a spiritual drought exists today is explained by God: *"If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river"* (Isaiah 48:18). God's abundant river of grace is received in vain by those who refuse to accept that the battle belongs to the Lord. God insists on obedience, not only because of who He is, but because He desires to bless those who belong to Him: *"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future'"* (Jeremiah 29:11).

There is a great failure in the church today to obey the command of Jesus to *"Go and make disciples."* Too many pulpits are occupied by 'nose counters' whose only goal is to increase membership. To this end they peddle cheap grace and easy salvation, and ignore the task of making disciples. Instead they promote the false idea that as long as a person responds to an altar call and says

a so-called '*sinner's prayer*,' he is eternally saved, irrespective of his lifestyle thereafter. The apostle Paul warns, "*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons*"(1 Timothy 4:1). One cannot imagine a more deceiving idea than not having to reap what one sows as Scripture promises (Galatians 6:7,8). Such teaching is a blatant perversion of the pure gospel handed down to us by the apostles.

Becoming immersed in God's river of grace requires we place our life on the altar as an offering. That allows the Holy Spirit to burn up anything that keeps Him from having control over our decisions and actions. Only as the fire of the Holy Spirit is allowed to refine does life becomes fruitful: "*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds*" (John 12:24). Having our lives bear a fruitful harvest is the promise of God when we meet the conditions of God. We're never going to become the *flames of fire* that God desires without first making a sacrifice that involves the death of self will.

We ourselves must become the burnt offering and allow the Holy Spirit to use our

lives as fuel for the fire. By permitting this to occur, God can use the least likely people to achieve miraculous results where those of great reputation and scholarship failed. The key is a surrendered life. But the fire won't continue to burn if we allow reliance on human effort to develop along the way. It isn't that God disregards natural ability, for He is the One who bestows ability on men. However, He doesn't want us to be deceived that spiritual battles are won by our efforts rather than through divine power by working of the Holy Spirit.

Each soldier in Gideon's army "*held his position around the camp*" as the enemy fled. This brings us to a fourth principle of genuine revival: **Revival brings demand to hold one's position.** As these soldiers took their place around the enemy camp, each man found himself separated from the next soldier by some distance. It is similar today when those in revival are required to stand in uncomfortable places at times. But stand we must! Our responsibility is to be steadfast in times of criticism from the lukewarm and from family members who are living in bondage to tradition. Church authorities may well protest a spiritual awakening that results from work of the Holy Spirit. At



times we may be required to stand without any support except from the One who will never leave or forsake us. But that's always more than sufficient! *Together* with the Lord Jesus, we can climb any mountain, ford any stream, and receive a great reward from our Commander-in-Chief for being faithful. Jesus promises, "*He who stands firm to the end will be saved*" (Matthew 24:13). What a splendid promise deposited in our heavenly bank account.

The empowering that results with the baptism in the Holy Spirit is given so that we might be witnesses for Christ, even in situations where we must hold our position despite being outnumbered. Yes, it means having our faith tried. But as Jesus tells us, "*Everyone will be salted with fire*" (Mark 9:49). To go AWOL (absent without leave) not only risks loss of blessings and possible judgment. It fails to give a positive example for those who need encouragement in their own struggles. From a human perspective, it's not always easy to persevere as a battle reaches its climax. But if we recognize that the battle is the LORD's and depend on His grace, then we know that victory is always just around the corner.

Until binding chains of the world, the flesh and the devil are broken, we'll not live

in the joy and peace that's available to each of us by grace. The power of these chains is already demolished by the atoning work of Christ at Calvary. The question is whether or not we will dip our heart into the river of grace that is waiting for us. How do we do this? It is by no longer insisting on doing as we see fit and becoming spiritually as little children. Those refusing to yield can forget about joining the army of *Three Hundred*. Even Gideon did not devise his own plan of battle. He obeyed God and left the results to Him. It was the same when Daniel entered a den of lions. Their mouths were shut the moment Daniel obeyed and prayed as had been his custom. Victory is gained once we make a determination to trust and obey.

No genuine and sustained revival will occur until we deliberately empty ourselves and make room for filling with the Spirit. It is quite possible to have short-lived times of increased religious fervor, but the zeal will be short-lived without laying down one's life for the sake of Christ. This involves house-cleaning of the heart and coming to grips with all areas that are not submitted to the lordship of Christ. To accomplish this, the Spirit must have unfettered permission to do His sanctifying work: "...from the begin-

*ning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).*

I agree with Chuck Smith, pastor at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, that the urgent need of the church in our day is empowering by baptism in the Holy Spirit. Only by keeping filled with the Holy Spirit as God commands (Ephesians 5:18) will the church be able to withstand the massive attack by “*Midianites*” in these last days. Lacking the power of the Spirit, the church will rapidly slide down a slippery slope from its present complacency into ever-increasing depravity that already exists within parts of both the Catholic and Protestant church in America.

The question to be asked by each of us is, “Am I prepared if the trumpet sounds today for gathering of the faithful by Jesus? Have I fully trusted in Christ for salvation by abandoning myself to the will of God for my life? Just as Gideon’s men pursued the enemy, have I been diligent to destroy sinful temptations and take captive my thoughts to make them obedient to Christ? Is the world comfortable with me, suggesting that my life is filled with spiritual compromise?”

The trumpets in this story symbolize testimony, while torches symbolize Christ-

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love that is to shine brightly in the lives of all who are faithful. To the everlasting glory of God, they brought victory to the army of Gideon and his three hundred men. Is the same true for you? Is it your testimony that people know you love Jesus by the example of your life? Or do you find it necessary to tell others that you are a Christian because little light of Jesus shines out of your life?

The hour has come to be soldiers for the Lord. It's time for alabaster jars in our lives to be smashed so a 'nothing held back' consecration can finally be made to serve in His army. An angel is watching the Father in heaven for a signal to sound the trumpet for rapture of the faithful. Let us earnestly seek to remain in revival until the glorious appearing of Christ in the clouds to gather His bride to Himself, and so to have us with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

*"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

2 Chronicles 7:14

# Epilogue

This story pictures the army of God in these last days. The number of soldiers available is far different than the number to be used in battle. Indeed, Scripture speaks of two kinds of persons in the church. One is worldly or carnal (1 Corinthians 3). These are “*lukewarm*” and lack a sacrificial spirit. They are often found hiding in clefts of self-centeredness, caves of immorality, and in strongholds of deception. Instead of denying self and putting to death misdeeds of flesh, they worship idols by living in a way that is identical to that of their pagan neighbors. They embrace a false gospel of compromise (2 Corinthians 11:3,4) and stand in danger of being led astray by false prophets (Matthew 7:15; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 6:19-21; Ephesians 5:5,6). Tending to be cultured and intellectual, they embrace formal ceremony and speak against the ‘ways’ of fellowships where the lost are radically saved, healed of sickness, and delivered from the demonic.

The second kind hears a call of the Lord Jesus to arms and repents of things that hinder spiritual growth. They deny self and take up crosses, enduring trials that

prepare them to witness more effectively for Christ. They seek the manifest presence of God in their life and are hungry for revival. Forgetting what is past, they eagerly press forward to serve Jesus out of love and devotion. Offering themselves as living sacrifices and earnestly waiting for the Lord's return, they comprise the army of *Three Hundred*. In spite of persecution, rejection and even slander that comes their way, the joy of the Lord and peace that passes understanding are constant companions in their journey through an alien world.

Gideon and his men found some of their countrymen rejecting requests for help in their battle (Judges 8:4-9). Many who profess Christ will also reject revival and refuse to take part in the activities birthed by any spiritual awakening. They'll be unwilling to assist those called to fight on the front lines and God will be angered by their refusal to help in the harvest of souls (Judges 8:13-17). On judgment day, they will find themselves reminded of His stern warning: "*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters*" (Luke 11:23).

Finally, the story contains a warning. Gideon realized that God saved Israel from the hands of Midian and he refused to take credit by ruling over the people. Instead he

said, "*The LORD rule over you.*" However, he did request a gold earring from each man's share of the plunder to make an ephod that was placed in his hometown as a memorial. This ephod eventually became an object of worship, even for Gideon and his family. The lesson here is the danger in glorifying revival for its own sake or exalting anything or anyone used by God in spiritual awakenings. Only the hand of God brings a revival, and all praise and honor must be reserved for Him. Like salvation, revival is the gift of God and must never be considered merited or earned by the efforts of man.

Those God will use as *flames of fire* in revival will be broken alabaster jars out of whom His light can shine brightly. Both self-sufficiency and pride will be consumed by fire and replaced by listening to the voice of the Spirit and yielding to His directions. Are you ready to join God's army of *Three Hundred*? Are you ready to sacrifice your personal convenience and comfort? Will you set aside your agenda and follow Jesus into battle as one of His consecrated soldiers?

No fence-sitting is permitted in giving answer to these questions. It must either be "*No!*" or "*Yes and Amen!*" However, only if your answer is the latter will you be able to say the following when the trumpet sounds and Jesus appears in the clouds:

*I've been a soldier for Christ. I've crossed the line and left my comfort zone. I didn't look back, slow down, or back away. I gave up walking by sight, having smooth knees and cheap giving. It wasn't necessary for me to have prosperity, promotions or even popularity. There was no wish to seek praise for myself because I lived by faith, leaned on His presence, was lifted by prayer, and only labored by His power.*

*The road was narrow and few were my companions. But the Holy Spirit proved a reliable Guide. He did not let me be detoured or delayed for long periods of time. He kept me from hesitating in the hour of humiliation, from pausing at pools of pleasure, and from flinching in the face of fatal illness. And now Jesus recognizes me as His bride. Because of His grace, I found it possible to leave my winepress and never return.*

*Come, Lord Jesus!*



The Old Testament story of Gideon is a *type* or illustration of steps needed for a revival following a time of complacency and backsliding. True revival is marked by sincere repentance, an inner change of attitude reflected in an outer change of behavior. This story reveals several **principles highlighting a revival** that help distinguish genuine revival from hyper-emotionalism. This book is must reading for those seeking to develop a closer relationship with Jesus and who desire to have a greater witness for Him in these last days of the church age.

*“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*

*2 Chronicles 7:14*