



The call of Gideon

Judges 6:11-24

Judges 6:25-40; 7:1-14, 15-25; 8:22-28, 33-35; Hebrews 11:32-12:2

The name

Gideon, whose name means "hewer" or "slasher", was the leader under whom Israel dealt a decisive blow against the Midianites, so that later prophecy could speak of a genuine victory as being like that of the "day of Midian" (Isaiah 9:4; 10:26).

For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Isaiah 9:4

The circumstances

Israel's entry into the Promised Land was still resented by the previous inhabitants and led to bitter conflicts. At the time of Gideon the Midianites kept making raids across the Jordan at harvest time, seizing the crops upon which the Israelites had bestowed so much labour. Judges 6:2-6

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 throughout the land and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. Judges 6:3-4

By doing so they broke the laws of ancient warfare. It was accepted that, in an attack on enemy territory, the standing crops of the enemy would be left alone since it would invite certain famine. That the Midianites were doing this shows how ruthless they were and how desperate was the plight of Israel.

The call

God's call found Gideon threshing the wheat in the winepress (a deep stone bath let into the ground) and not on the usual threshing-floor. Gideon was able to thresh his wheat without the enemy seeing him; not a very heroic act even if discreet. Note that Gideon, like Moses, was unwilling to answer the call.

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." Judges 6:14-16

He is despondent and feels God has forsaken them, yet so assuring was the encounter he had with God, so definite was the promise that God would be with him which was confirmed by signs (6: 14, 16, 19ff), he recognised the call and the revelation by building an altar. We would all do well to record in some way the encounters God has with us. The Apostle Paul was very fond of telling of his conversion, indicating how well Paul remembered it and how much it meant to him - see Acts 9:3-22; Acts 22:4-21; Acts 26:9-15; 1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:8; Galatians 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:12-13.

The result

Gideon begins at home, often the hardest place to witness to God's call. His own home had compromised by worshipping the gods of Canaan, the Baals, and his father had a grove where he had erected an altar to Baal (6:25-27). This altar Gideon pulled down and, although threatened by death at the hands of his own people, he survived.

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 Asherah pole beside it." Judges 6:30

He asked for a sign from God to confirm His call, something God does not always refuse though Jesus refused it to the religious leaders of His day and He calls the kind of faith that looks for it a second-rate faith.

Jesus also said, ***"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:29***

God will always guide His true servants who are intent on fulfilling His will.

The way Gideon chose his men shows his new found fearlessness and his faith. He would have nothing to do with the fearful (7:3), sending 22,000 home.

He announced to the people, ***"Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead."*** The result was that, ***"...twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained."*** Judges 7:3

Those who showed a careless lack of watchfulness by stooping to drink the water of the spring were also sent home, 9,700. Driving out the Midianites with 300 men using surprise tactics and fear to panic them into flight shows Gideon's immense courage and powers of leadership. A man of conviction, he knew his God. He trusted in Him and was able to carry out many exploits.

When God calls a man and equips him with faith, who can tell what God can do with that man whatever the odds.