

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

July 19, 2020

I. Introduction

A. Over the past several weeks we have looked at the power of wealth, culture, selfishness, envy, and pride, to lead us away from God. Today we will look at the power of faith in God to promote obedience to God with the outcome being the blessings of God.

B. Prayer

II. The power of faith to promote obedience which brings God's blessings

A. To get the most from the story of Gideon, we will begin in **Judges 2**, in order to better understand the situation Israel was in, how they got there, and why they needed a deliverer.

1. In **Judges 2:14-15**, we learn that after Joshua and his generation died out, the next generation turned away from God and worshiped idols. God disciplined them in two ways. He allowed plunderers to come into the Land to plunder the Israelites, and He stopped empowering the Israelites to defeat the enemies surrounding them. But then, He had warned them He would discipline them if they became like the sinful nations around them (*remember the Blessings and Curses? Leviticus 26:14-29; Deuteronomy 28:15-68*).

2. In **Judges 2:16-22**, we read that after Joshua's generation died out, the LORD raised up judges to delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them...[18] And the LORD was with the judge and delivered Israel from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. [19] But when the judge died, they would turn back and **act more corruptly than their fathers**, in following other gods; and they would not repent or abandon their evil ways. [20] So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, [21] I will no longer drive out before them (*give Israel victory over*) any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, [22] in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not."

a. Because the Israelites continued to return to old sinful ways, God allowed their circumstances to be such that it was harder for them to choose righteousness or remain faithful to God. God

did not make it impossible for Israel to obey, just harder. And He did this to see if they wanted God and His ways enough to put in the effort required to live according to God's word.

- b. God does the same in our lives. The longer we continue in known sin, the more natural it becomes to commit that sin and the harder it becomes to drive that sin out of our lives. Why? Because God tests our sincerity and desire for godliness by withdrawing enough of His protection and empowerment to make it harder.
3. Therefore, because Israel repeatedly and unrepentantly returned to the sinful ways of the nations around them, God responded by withdrawing some of His protection and empowerment for victory. And so Israel cycled through times of having Judges who freed them from bondage to foreign powers, and times of being defeated and in bondage to foreign kings and nations.
 - a. For example, because of their sinfulness, Israel was ruled by the king of Mesopotamia for eight years. When they cried out to God for relief, God raised up Othniel (*AHTH nih el*), Caleb's younger brother, who judged them and enabled them to live in peace for forty years (**Judges 3:7-14**).
 - b. However, after Othniel died, the Israelites returned to their evil ways, so the LORD strengthened the king of Moab, and Israel served him for eighteen years.
 - c. God's next deliverer was Ehud (*EE huhd*), and under him Israel lived in peace for 80 years. But after he died, Israel returned to their evil ways, and this cycle continued until we get to Gideon.
- B. The power of faith to produce obedience which brings God's blessings
 1. **Judges 6:1 . . . The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years.**
 2. I want to point out three important truths related to this verse.
 - a. **First**, though you can pass on religious beliefs and practices to the next generation, you cannot pass on life-changing faith, or an obedience to God that comes from the heart, or perseverance in pursuing a godly life.
 - (1) The next generation, including our children, must choose for themselves to see God as good, to trust God, obey God, and persevere in living a godly life.
 - (2) However, you can pass on a **living example** of a godly life so the next generation knows what a godly life looks like.

- b. **Second**, sin, idolatry, and distrust of God grow and grow until they consume and ruin those who don't or won't repent of them. Like weeds in a garden, pulling them out once is not enough to keep your garden weed free. You must be vigilant in removing any sin or idolatry or distrust that starts growing again.
 - (1) Sadly, it is all too common for the next generation to be less vigilant than your generation in keeping their lives, their home, their church, and their nation free of such evils.
 - (2) We see the truth of this in **Judges 2:19** which says that when a judge would die, the Israelites would turn back and act **more** corruptly than their fathers.”
 - c. **Third**, leadership makes a difference. Godly, sensible, practical leadership leads people to pursue God and godliness. Ungodly or religiously shallow leadership opens the door for the people to pursue worldly ways and fleshly pleasures.
3. [2] The power of Midian prevailed against Israel (*because God had withdrawn this amount of protection*). Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves dens which were in the mountains and [used] the caves and the strongholds (*to hide from the Midianites and keep what little they could store in their hideaways*).
 4. [3] For it was after Israel had [planted their crops] that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and [4] destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. [5] For they would come [into Israel] with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like [a blanket of] locusts, both they and their camels; and they would devastate the land.
 5. [6] So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD.
 - a. When times were good and life was relatively easy, the Israelites turned their backs on God, worshiped idols, and got involved in the sinful ways of the idolatrous people around them. But when God's discipline became more than they wanted to bear, they turned to God for relief.
 - b. The interesting thing about this cycle is that the Israelites knew all along that God was the only one who could save them. However, they didn't want to be saved from the pleasures and earthly advantages gained from sin and idolatry, they only wanted to be saved from the painful, unwanted consequences of their disobedience and sin. Isn't this like us, sometimes?

6. [7] Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, [8] that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he [gave them a dose of reality, by saying], "It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. [9] I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, [10] and I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. **But you have not obeyed Me.**'"
- a. And yet, in spite of their disobedience, God came to their aid and rescued them from the forewarned consequences of their own choices and behavior.
 - b. To our shame, we are quick to point out what we believe are God's failings, yet slow to notice and give thanks for the daily blessings and gracious dealings of God in spite of what we deserve because of our sinful choices and behavior.
 - c. And sadder still, it is rare for God's people to consider the possibility that their difficult circumstances are the result of God's discipline due to their own sinful choices and behavior. Yet, like Israel in this story, when God's discipline becomes more than we want to bear, we cry out to God for relief instead repenting, confessing, and returning to godly ways.

C. **Judges 6:11** . . . Then the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah (*AHF ruh*) which belonged to Joash as his son Gideon was **beating out wheat in the wine press** in order to save it from the Midianites. [12] The angel of the Lord said to [Gideon], "**The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior.**" [13] Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, **if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?** And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Median."

1. Out of all the men in Israel, God selected Gideon for the task at hand – which is an example of God's sovereignty. Yet Gideon had the freedom to accept or reject God's call to service – which is an example of man's free will in the face of God's sovereignty.
2. Gideon also had the freedom to respond to the angel's greeting any way he wanted. And when the angel said, "The Lord is with you" Gideon responded with, "If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"

3. You see, it didn't occur to Gideon that Israel's troubles were the result of Israel's sinfulness. He saw them as God's failure to lovingly and miraculously protect them and care them.
 4. And isn't that just like many of us. When troubles come, we are far more prone to blame God or wonder why God didn't prevent it then to look at ourselves to see if it is possible our circumstances are the result of God's discipline due to repeated or prolonged sinfulness.
- D. [14] The Lord looked at Gideon and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" (*Notice, God did not respond to Gideon's misperception of reality. He left it up to Gideon to use his intelligence to come to the right conclusion.*)
- E. [15] Gideon said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." (*In other words, "I can't do this alone. I need an army. But who will listen to me? Who will follow me? I'm a nobody!"*)
- F. [16] The Lord responded by saying, "**Surely I will be with you**, and you shall defeat Midian as one man." (*That is, don't worry about needing human help, I, God will be with you – and that will be enough.*)
- G. [17] So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then **show me a sign** that it is You who speak with me. [18] Please do not depart from here, until I come back to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You." And the Lord said, "I will remain until you return."
- H. [19] So Gideon prepared a meal and brought it to the angel of God. [20] The angel said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. [21] Then the angel put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. (*Remember Gideon's request for a sign? The consuming fire was his sign – and as we continue this story, notice Gideon's progression from thinking ill of God to trusting God, and from questioning God's plan to doing what God said.*)
- I. [22] When Gideon realized the being before him was the angel of the Lord, Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face." [23] The Lord said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die." [24] Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it **The Lord is Peace** (*Jehovah-Shalom*).
- J. [25] Now on the same night the Lord said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal

which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah (*uh SHEE ruh*) that is beside it; [26] and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down." [27] **Then Gideon** took ten men of his servants and **did as the Lord had spoken to him**; and because he was **too afraid** of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night. (*We see here that Gideon's faith in God is driving his obedience to God, and though his faith-driven courage was not what it would become in the near future, it was enough to do what God asked him to do – which is progress in the right direction.*)

- K. **Judges 6:33** . . . Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel (*JEZ reel*). [34] So the **Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon** (*God always empowers us to live according to His will and word. But sometimes God goes further and gives us the confidence and courage needed to step up, take charge, and fulfill God's will or live according to His word.*); and Gideon blew a trumpet, and the armies of the Abiezrites, Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali came to fight with him.
- L. [36] Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, [37] behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken." (*The more challenging the task or difficult the requirements, the more inclined we are to question what we already know to be true, or to seek affirmation that what we are about to do is really God's will. And we see from Gideon's story that God is not offended by this.*)
- M. [38] And God made it happen according to Gideon's request. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. [39] Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground." [40] God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.
1. Though Gideon's faith was strong enough to blow the trumpet and call Israel's armies together, it wasn't yet strong enough for him to confidently lead the army into battle. Trusting God for calling an army together seems a lot easier and more reasonable than trusting

God for victory when fighting a formidable foe. And this was the case with Gideon, because his faith was still growing.

2. Now remember, Gideon already had two miraculous signs (*the consuming fire and dew on the fleece*), but in this situation they weren't enough. He did have enough faith in the goodness of God and understanding of how to approach God to humbly ask for one more sign, and God gave it. Do you see God's gracious patience in nurturing Gideon's faith? Do you see God doing the same for you?
- N. **Judges 7:1** . . . Then Gideon and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod. [2] The Lord said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.' (*Here is a picture of how easy it is for us to take the credit for something God has done – not just in big things like war, but in everyday life. If you want to build your faith, work at giving humble recognition and thanks to God for all He does for you.*)
- O. [3] Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.'" So **22,000 people returned**, but **10,000 remained**. [4] Then the Lord said to Gideon, "The army is still too large; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. [5] So Gideon brought the soldiers down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps from those who kneel to drink." [6] Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was **300 men**; but all the rest of the soldiers (9,700) kneeled to drink water. [7] The Lord said to Gideon, "I will [give you the victory] with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go home." (*Imagine going into battle against an army that vs 12 describes as being as numerous as locusts, and their camels as without number. But by this time, Gideon's faith was strong enough to confidently do what God said to do, in spite of what the situation looked like.*)
- P. [9] Now that same night the Lord said to Gideon, "Arise, go down to the camp, for I have given it into your hands. [10] But if you are afraid to go by yourself (*notice God's gracious sensitivity toward a first-timer doing a God-ordered challenging task*), take Purah (*PYOO ruh*) your servant with you, [11] and you will hear what the enemy soldiers are saying. Afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp."

- Q. [10] So Gideon went with Purah down to the outposts of the camp. [13] When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. He said, "Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat." [14] His friend replied, "This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand." (*Notice God's activity among the enemy soldiers, activity which would have been unknown if Gideon had not gone to the camp. The great truth here is that God is at work in ways we often do not see, yet those ways are working for our good. Will you trust Him, even when you cannot see what He is doing? This was God's fourth sign to encourage Gideon's faith and obedience.*) [15] When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship.
- R. Gideon returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the Lord has given the camp of Midian into your hands." [16] He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. [17] He said to them, "Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. [18] When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, 'For the Lord and for Gideon.'" (*Remember, the enemy knew about Gideon, the mention of his name would add fear to the situation.*)
- S. [19] So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. [20] When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" [21] Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. [22] When they blew 300 trumpets, **the Lord set the sword of one against another** even throughout the whole army; and the army fled. [23] The men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.

III. Conclusion

- A. From the beginning to the end of this story, God was intricately and intimately involved, and though Gideon's faith started weak, it ended strong. May we see the value of trusting God and the power of that faith to promote obedience with the outcome being God's blessings.