

GIDEON'S THREE HUNDRED (Judges 7)

Last Sunday morning we watched young David as he confronted Goliath in the Valley of Elah. There are many conflicts throughout the Old Testament, and another conflict was led by Gideon who lived in the period ruled by the judges after Moses and Joshua, and before the establishment of the Kingdom under King Saul. [*Abraham – Isaac – Jacob (+12 sons ... Joseph) – 430 years – Moses – Joshua - Judges*]

It was a very erratic time during which the children of Israel were constantly invaded by their enemies. Back in the time of Moses, God had made a covenant with the children of Israel, - it was a 'two-way' covenant, conditional on the Israelites honouring it ... God had promised, **Dt. 30:15** *I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil [... you have a choice ...];* **16** *In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.* **17** *But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;* **18** *I denounce [declare] unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. ... God made it clear He would bless their obedience, but punish their disobedience.*

For a while, - as you might expect, - they upheld their side of the covenant and they respected God and obeyed Him. However, their good intentions 'wore off' and they returned to their old ways, **Judges 6:1** *And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.* **2** *And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel ...* **6** *And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD. ... They realised God alone was the answer to the problem of their own making, and He provided Gideon,* **11** *And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.* **12** *And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.* **13** *And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.* **14** *And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. ... Gideon initially remonstrated with the Lord, but gradually he became convinced.*

Let's notice what happened ... The enemy had to be put out of the land, - it had to be defeated, and this was no easy task! The children of Israel had been invaded, and were demoralised ... "What is there that we can do? We are in such a plight!" ... So, the Lord commanded Gideon to call all the men who belonged to the tribe of Manasseh to join him in the Valley of Jezreel, to face the Midianites and their allies.

Now, there were far more Midianites than Israelites, nevertheless, ^{7:2} the LORD said unto Gideon, *The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands* ... Lord, how is that possible? Lord, what is Your reasoning [*Remember, God's ways are not our ways, and our ways are not God's ways*] ... Lord, surely You've got Your calculations wrong because there is far more of them than there is of us! ... But the Lord explained what He meant, ² *The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.* ... Gideon, if you and your people win the battle in your own strength, you will boast about your exploits, and you will go back to the way you were previously, withholding from Me the glory.

So, God instructed Gideon, ³ *Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead.* ... Any men in your army who is frightened of fighting in the battle, give them the option to go home ... and out of 32,000 men, 22,000 went home (almost 70% [*68.75%*]). ... If you had been Gideon, how would you have been feeling?! ... On the side of Gideon and the Israelites were 10,000 men, while on the other side, ¹² *the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.* ... If you had been Gideon, what thoughts would have been going through your head?!

However, the Lord said there was *still* too many, - if we would have been there, we would have thought there wasn't enough! Nevertheless, ⁴ the LORD said unto Gideon, *The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.* ... Do you notice how the Lord 'brought them down' (v.4) even further ... as if they had not been 'brought down' enough, from 32,000 to 10,000!

So how did God's plan work? ... Was He intending to choose the Israelites with the biggest swords? Or the younger and more fit men? Or the men at the front who were 'rearing' to go? ... No, He brought them down even further, - from 10,000 to 300! ... Altogether, from 32,000 to 300, - that is less than 0.1% of the original! ... He commanded they go for a walk, and He told Gideon where to take them, ⁵ So he [*Gideon*] brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. ... It was a simple matter ... were they attentive to the situation they faced? ... They needed a drink, but they also needed to beware of, - to be 'on their guard' against, - the enemy. ... ⁶ And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. ... From the original 32,000, the Lord reduced the army of Israel to 10,000, and from an army of potentially 10,000 He reduced them further to a '*ridiculous*' 300 men! ... And here is what we see ... **God's Plan**. ... Sometimes we fail in understanding God's plan because in our style of faith, our own resources can become the enemy of trust, and we don't trust God the way we ought. We want to understand, and when we don't understand, the act of believing God suffers for we don't trust Him as we ought. Often when the Lord reduces our resources (from "32,000" to "300"), it is not punishment ... but it is preparation for Him to be glorified in what we trust Him with.

God's plan was for **God's people** to be saved out of the hands of the enemy, - God would never abandon His own ... the children of Israel were His people. They had been under the enemy's control for seven years, but God's plan was to set His people free, for they were His 'pride and joy', **Zech. 2:8** *he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye*.... that is how precious they were (and are).

God continued to love them for they were the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with whom He had made an everlasting and *unconditional* covenant ... a covenant He would never break. The covenant He had made with Moses was different in that it was a conditional covenant, conditional to their day-to-day obedience to His laws ... If you **Dt. 30:16** *love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments ... the LORD thy God shall bless thee ...* ¹⁷ **But** *if thine heart turn away, ... ye shall surely perish.* ... And that is what had happened, and why Gideon was sent to deliver his people from the yoke of the Midianites, **Judges 6:6** *Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.*

God will never abandon His people. When you become a Christian, you become His child ... and that is a privilege which will never be taken from you. When you are born into His Family, He has brought about that new birth, - He has given you spiritual life, and no-one nor nothing can take it from you. It is yours forever! ... Jesus said, **Jn. 10:28** *I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.* **29** *My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.* ... And even if you might wander off, He will bring you back because He loves you and you are His. He paid the price for you to belong to Him, and you are saved because His Son shed His own blood for you on the cross ... and just as God had previously made the promise to Abraham that the nation which would come from him would be a covenanted people, so God's promise remains for *all* His children, **Is. 43:1** *Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.* ... He will never take that privilege away, - you cannot be a child of God one day, and *not* the next ... for in Christ is to be saved eternally, which means *forever*.

... And God would not cast off the nation of Israel because He had made the unconditional promise to Abraham, **Gen. 12:2** *I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.* ... And when the Lord makes a promise He keeps it for His glory ... and He works it out in accordance with His plan!

So, as a child of God, you belong to God's people. You have been born-again. Your sins have been washed away. You have been cleansed by the precious blood of the Saviour, and you belong to God's people. ... **God's Plan ... God's People ... God's Promise ...**

Gideon would not have been our first choice as a leader. For one thing, he was hiding in a winepress (6:11)! Also, his family had succumbed to the idolatry of the Midianites, for they had an altar of Baal in their house (v.25)! ... You can also 'pick up on' the impatience and unbelief in Gideon's voice, **6:13** *Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of ...?* ... If Gideon was *the best* the Lord could choose, it doesn't say much for the rest of the Israelites! They had lost their confidence, **15** *And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?* ... In other words, Gideon was prepared to continue to live under the yoke of Midian ...

... But Gideon, *God* is speaking to *you!* ... **6:12** And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour, - it is obvious he wasn't a mighty man of valour at *that* time for he was hiding in a winepress, but God was telling him he would become a mighty man of valour through God's grace, **14** And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? ... God had a plan, and He gave the promises He would uphold ... and that is why even someone like Gideon is included in the great 'Hall of Faith' in Hebrews 11:32.

God works with imperfect people to bring His will to fulfilment. That is why we do not trust in ourselves, in our abilities or numbers. ... God brought the army of Israel, - such as it was, - down from 32,000 to 300 ... and He used a man hiding in a hole in the ground for fear of the enemy. Our God can do mighty things, even with the likes of us! ... If Gideon had continued to argue with God and doubt His ability, the Midianites would have remained in power. If Gideon had not come to trust in God, Israel would have been finished!

There can be many 'ifs', but when you place your trust in God the problems are taken out of your hands and He takes over. His will is that the gates of Hell will never prevail against His people, and He will see to it! ... That means we have God on our side, and He promises we are more than conquerors. Gideon's small army were outnumbered, but they had God on their side.

None of us are any better than Gideon ... but we are trusting in Gideon's God! With those three hundred men, God had him confront the vast multitude of the Midianites, the Amalekites, and all the children of the east (7:12) ... And here is how they did it, - they used a form of attack no other army would use [*Zech. 4:6 Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts*] ... They split up *again* into three groups of one hundred (v.16), and Gideon told them to surround the enemy, - it sounds so ridiculous, but so often the plans of God are beyond our understanding, but look at this, **7:16** And he [*Gideon*] divided the three hundred men into three companies, - he did as he was instructed, - and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers [*large jars*], and lamps within the pitchers. **17** And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do [*he led by example*]. **18** When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. **19** So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch [*from 10 pm ... and the middle watch continued to 2 am*]; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the

trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. ²⁰ And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. ²¹ And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. ... Using the most unconventional tactics, the enemies of God were defeated, according to His instructions!

God's Plan, God's People, and God's Promise ... It is an *invincible* combination! ... We often doubt our potential, - and rightly so, - but we ought never to doubt what God can do. Gideon's God is our God, and no matter what predicament we find ourselves in, He is as powerful today as ever!

God's Plan, God's People, and God's Promise ...

Trust in God and you will know
 He can vanquish any foe;
 Simply trust Him day by day, -
 He will be your strength and stay.