

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Judges And Ruth: Personal Blessing Amid Group Apostasy

Part II: History Of The Era Of The Judges

B. The Record Of Specific Judges, Judges 3:7-16:31

5. Gideon's Judgeship: God's Developing A Prodigal Into An Effective Leader, Judges 6:1-8:21

b. God's Stretching While Nurturing Gideon's Faith

(Judges 6:36-7:22a)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

As God works to stretch our faith in Him, an essential move that He might use us to accomplish His will in our spiritually challenging era, that stretching process can take a toll, making us fearful, so we need encouragement.

Take for example what is happening in Israel: Jerold S. Auerback, professor emeritus of history at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, in an op-ed ("A Boy's Discovery Rebuts Temple Mount Revisionism," The Wall Street Journal, October 26, 2015, p. A17) told how the furor of Palestinian attacks on Jews with "bullets, knives and rocks," has been hyped by the spread of a false rumor that Israel was going to allow Jews to pray at the temple mount.

Such an idea is an utter abomination to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas who dismissed "any Jewish connection to the Temple Mount. According to the Jerusalem Post, he told activists at an October 14 meeting in his Ramallah office, "Al-Aksa [the Temple Mount] is ours and so is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. They have no right to desecrate them with their filthy feet," Ibid.

In other words, belief that the Jewish people built Solomon's temple around 1,000 B. C. is simply denied, for Muslims believe they had original access to the site, and that Jews and Christians have no right to be there. As a result, "hundreds of tons of earth and rock" have "been illegally excavated from below the Temple Mount in the late 1990s by the Muslim Waqf that intends to "build and underground mosque" there, Ibid.

So, Muslims are now attacking Jews in Israel to keep them from being able to pray at the temple mount that Muslims believe became holy only after Islam got started around A. D. 600, not that there was some presumed Jewish temple on that site dating back to the days of Solomon or David. Essentially, references to a Hebrew temple at the Temple Mount dating from the time of David and Solomon are vehemently being denied. We need encouragement.

Need: *Accordingly we ask, "As God seeks to increase our faith that He might more effectively use us in today's incredibly spiritually needy world, what encouragement does He offer in nurturing us along on that journey?!"*

- I. **Once God caused Gideon to revere so as to obey Him in destroying his father's idols, the Spirit of God came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet, calling Israel to follow him to fight Midian, Judges 6:33-35.**
- II. **Judges 7:3 indicates that the initial number of men who followed Gideon was 32,000, small compared to the innumerable hordes they were to fight (Judges 6:5), so Gideon asked for God's encouragements that He would *MIRACULOUSLY* rescue Israel by his hand, "putting out some fleeces," Judges 6:37-40:**
 - A. He asked for a divine miracle in which God would arrange for dew to settle only on a fleece of wool that he would lay out on a threshing floor while leaving all other objects in the area dry, a miracle signaling that God would miraculously give Israel victory over the invaders with just 32,000 men, Judges 6:37 ESV.
 - B. The Lord graciously answered Gideon that night, arranging for the fleece to be so loaded with dew that he was able to wring out a bowl of water of dew from the fleece, Judges 6:38.
 - C. However, Gideon likely had second-thoughts about his initial request, possibly realizing that "the surrounding threshingfloor might naturally dry before the fleece" (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 393), so he asked God for one more sign -- that Gideon put out a fleece and see God miraculously keep the fleece dry while soaking everything else around it with dew as God's assurance that He would miraculously give him victory, Jud. 6:39.
 - D. In His grace, God answered by leaving the fleece that next night the only entity that was dry, Judges 6:40.
- III. **Emboldened with these divine encouragements, Gideon led his warriors to camp on the Mount Gilead range south of the Valley of Esdraelon near the spring of Harod at the base of that hill in preparation of attacking the Midianite hordes in the Valley of Esdraelon that lay to the north below them, Judges 7:1.**
- IV. **However, to Gideon's shock, God told him that he had too many men with him for God to give Israel the victory lest the men of Israel claim that they had gained the victory in their own power, Judges 7:2.**
- V. **Thus, God had Gideon tell everyone in the army following him who was afraid to return to their homes, and 22,000 men left, leaving only 10,000 still following Gideon, Judges 7:3.**

- VI. Nevertheless, God explained that Gideon still had too many men with him, Judges 7:4a. Thus, Gideon was to take the 10,000 men with him down from the Mount Gilead hillside to the spring of Harod at the southern edge of the Valley of Esdraelon where they could see the Midianite hordes in full force just hundreds of yards away and to test them there for the fewer number God wanted to use, Judges 7:4b.**
- VII. The test involved having the men drink water from the spring: those who dropped down on their faces to drink were to be sent to their homes while those who raised the water to their mouths to lap it from cupped would remain in Gideon's army, Judges 7:5-7. This test eliminated all but 300 men! (Judges 7:8)**
- VIII. Going from 32,000 to 300 men, Gideon realized that he was going to need a really BIG sign from the Lord that He would provide a really BIG miracle to help him defeat an innumerable host of invaders, and the Lord graciously anticipated his need, and arranged for Gideon to get it in Judges 7:9-15a:**
- A. The Lord initiated the move for Gideon to go with his servant Purah to the outskirts of the Midianite camp that night to hear what some men there would say as an encouragement for Gideon to attack them, Judges 7:9-11a.
 - B. Gideon followed the Lord's lead, creeping down with his servant Purah under cover of darkness that night to the outskirts of the enemy camp, a camp of an innumerable number of men and camels, Judges 7:11b-12.
 - C. There they heard a man telling a dream he had to a comrade, that a cake of barley had tumbled into the camp and came to a tent of Midian and struck it so that it fell and turned upside down, lying flat, Judges 7:13 ESV.
 - D. The comrade interpreted the dream, claiming it referred to the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man in Israel, meaning God had given into his hand Midian and his entire host, Judges 7:14 ESV.
 - E. The symbolism alone verified this interpretation to Gideon: barley was a poor man's bread, well picturing Israel then, and the tent represented the nomadic Midianites, *Ibid.*, *B. K. C., O. T.*, p. 394. For a Midianite to claim that impoverished Israel under Gideon would crush the Midianites showed God was already at work as He was in the days of Joshua to spread fear among Israel's foes (cf. Joshua 10:9-10), a move that God had promised His Angel of the Lord would accomplish in helping Israel win her wars, Exodus 23:20-23, 27.
- IX. Gideon then worshiped God, and returned to his men, urging them to follow him. He split them into 3 groups, gave each man a trumpet to make them sound like many companies, and each man was given a torch in a clay pot, Judges 7:15b-16. Each man was to follow Gideon's lead of blowing the trumpet and shouting, "For the Lord and for Gideon," breaking the clay pot and holding up the torch, Jud. 7:17-20.**
- X. The plan worked to perfection: as each of Gideon's men stood their ground around the Midianite camp, copying Gideon's lead, the entire enemy host cried out in fear and fled, and God caused the Midianites to become so mentally disoriented that they fought one another throughout the entire host, Jud. 7:21-22a.**

Lesson: *When God went to work to stretch Gideon's faith, knowing full well that this process needed to be tempered with encouragement that God would truly miraculously equip Gideon to succeed, God also richly encouraged him that He would give him victory to where Gideon could begin to gain the victory over the enemy.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ for salvation, John 3:16. (2) As God stretches our faith necessary in our era of great spiritual need for Him to use us effectively, may we rely on Him for signals of encouragement that He will really supernaturally help us succeed in His assignment.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

In our sermon introduction, we noted how attacks by Muslims on Jews in Israel has come from a false rumor that Israel was getting ready to allow Jews to pray at the temple site, for Muslims hold that they were the first to have anything to do with the site with the rise of Muhammad around A. D. 600, the cause behind all this furor.

However, we have received a great bit of encouragement amid all this error: recently, "(a) 10-year-old Russian boy . . . (w)orking as a volunteer in the Temple Mount Sifting Project" of illegally excavated earth and rock, in sifting through some of the debris "found a 3,000-year-old seal -- engraved limestone about the size of a thimble, with a hole at one end so it could be hung from a string" that dates "from the time of King David." (*Ibid.*, Auerbach) This "seal confirms the ancient Jewish presence in Jerusalem -- more than a millennium before the Muslim Dome of the Rock was built above the ruins of the ancient temples," *Ibid.* The Jews "now . . . have a 10-year-old boy to thank for providing them with a three-millennia-old artifact that refutes modern propaganda designed to rewrite history," *Ibid.*

So, amid all the current hype about the Temple Mount, God has arranged for a find to validate our Bible's historical record of that site, supporting the truth of His Word against all false propaganda to the contrary.

May we trust in Christ for salvation. As believers, may we then look to the Lord not only to stretch our faith to make us useful to Him, but also then encourage us in the process that He will actually make us succeed!