

Gideon Transcends the Midianites

~ Stennett Eberly

The Israelite nation was in great distress. God had allowed the Midianites to dominate Israel for seven years. But now they had come upon them at the time of sowing with numbers like those of a swarm of grasshoppers and the Israelites knew all too well what they were after. Judges 6:5 says that *“they entered into the land to destroy it.”* Thievery of seed was very common in those days, and the Israelites knew that their chances of getting the all important harvest had just been sharply reduced. In response, they cried out to the Lord and God raised up Gideon.

Let us consider how Gideon transcended his natural inclinations and rose to the huge assignment that God had given him. The dictionary defines transcend as “to go beyond a limit or range of thought or belief.” As Christians living in the last days, we must be able to “go beyond the (world’s) limit or range of thought or belief” if we will accomplish God’s work today. Gideon’s responses in Judges 6 and 7 provide many examples of operating

According to principles that he could not see in the world around him. The idea of transcending his circumstances, of course, includes his trust in God and his living by faith, but it also emphasizes how radical the work was that God wanted to accomplish through him. God found Gideon crouching beside the winepress threshing wheat, but now his name is one of the most illustrious on the list in Hebrews 11. How did he get from the winepress to Bible fame?

First, Gideon had to transcend the past. The first thing that he said when the Lord came to him in Judges 6:13 was *“Why have all these things befallen us? Where are all the miracles which our fathers told us of?”* We are delivered into the hands of the Midianites, he said. How can the Lord be with us? Like we do, he was trying to understand how a good God could allow evil in his experience. Although he surely knew of the evil the Israelites had done to merit the Midianite takeover, this was the first thing that he tried to reconcile with God. It’s a question we all grapple with—How do I find God good in my experience? How do I trust Him? How do I transcend the evil I have seen? But Gideon did that; he stepped out and accepted the responsibility that God gave him for the future in spite of his questions about the past.

Next, I believe that Gideon had to transcend the ordinary. In verse 17, he asks the Lord to show him a sign that God has actually talked with him. It seems that he lacked confidence to trust his five senses! Here he had been threshing wheat, and suddenly the angel of the Lord was there. Gideon was like us; he did not expect heavenly beings to appear in the middle of his daily activities, but he rose above this natural doubt that the encounter was real. Gideon truly shows his humanity in asking for confirmation that the exchange had not been just a hallucination. Once the Lord performed a miracle and caused the food to be consumed and rise in smoke, Gideon accepted the validity of the angel’s appearance and worshipped. He said, “I have seen an angel of the Lord (this term is often considered to refer to the pre-incarnate Christ) face to face!” How often does God try to manifest His presence to us in our daily life? How often does our lack of confidence hide His presence from us?

After destroying the altars of Baal, Gideon was still beset by lingering doubts. so he asked the Lord for a sign, actually two of them. We could see this as a sign of Gideon’s unbelief, but his

experiments with the fleece allowed God to put his doubts to rest. He had doubts because of the gravity of the situation, but he did not give up in the face of those doubts. He transcended his doubts to believe in something bigger.

In Judges 7, Gideon accomplishes the destruction of the Midianites. However, before the mission started, Gideon was tested severely again when God altered what man would consider the most reasonable preparations. The Midianites had a huge army camped right below them in the valley! But God thinned Gideon's ranks from 32,000 to 10,000 to finally only 300 men! Only a man who could trust in God's plan would have been able to accept that. His sight could see the multitude of Midianites spread out before them, but Gideon was not trusting in his five senses. He was not making decisions based on what he could see, but he was trusting God to work as it pleased Him. To further test Gideon's faith, he was sent to surround the Midianite camp with only lamps, pitchers, and trumpets! From an earthly standpoint, Gideon lacked the means of victory. From heaven's vantage point, the victory was assured.

There is one final truth that we can see from the story of Gideon. The Midianite army did deteriorate into chaos and finally retreated. The victory won that day by the Israelites was so complete that Judges 8:28 says that "*they [the Midianites] lifted up their heads no more.*" Indeed, history hardly mentions Midian anymore after Gideon. Certainly they were never a force to be feared again. Because Gideon's vision transcended his circumstances, God was able to give him a victory that transcended his greatest expectations. We still serve that same God today.

~ Ontario, OR
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