

A HERO WILL RISE

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 6:1-24

Topic

Gideon's war against the Midianites is foretold by the Angel of the Lord while sitting under the tree at Ophrah

Title

"The Ophrah WarTree"

Introduction

People who are closely associated with caves have strange names:

- A person who explores caves is called a *spelunker*.
- A person who dwells in caves is called a *troglodyte*.

Finish this sentence: "It's so easy..." (a cave man can do it).

Geico made being a troglodyte attractive with that ad campaign. It was so popular that there was a spin-off television show in 2007, titled *Cavemen*. It didn't last long, I think only six episodes; but when else has a commercial inspired a show?

We still can't shake the caveman appeal. Some of you are probably on the Paleo diet, which is based mainly on foods presumed to have been available to Paleolithic humans, i.e., cavemen.

With one major exclusion: dinosaur meat.

The Israelites in Judges chapter six were going through a troglodyte phase. In verse two we read, "Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the **caves**, and the strongholds which *are* in the mountains."

Every year, as the harvest season arrived, enemies would invade the Promised Land. They'd take the crops, but even worse, they'd drive their own livestock through, devouring the grazing land. It was so bad that they were compared to a locust plague.

The Israelites would hide in "dens... caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains." The people of God dealt with their trouble by **hiding**.

I want to talk about hiding. Christians sometimes hide. It's not unusual, for example, for a believer who is going through a severe trial to withdraw from fellowship. I understand it; I do it myself. Depending on the nature of the trial, you might be embarrassed. You might simply be tired of talking about it over-and-over again. So you hide.

You can be hiding and not even realize it. For example you might sense that the Lord wants you to do something. You don't feel up to the task, so you respectfully refuse. It is a kind of spiritual hiding in a cave of false humility.

Pastors and Christian workers can become so busy with what they think is ministry that they ignore ministry in their own homes, to the detriment of their families, and in disobedience to the Lord. Their public ministry becomes a well-furnished cave in which they are hiding from their responsibilities at home.

What should you do if you discover you're a Christian troglodyte? I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 If You Realize You're In Hiding, Relive What Jesus Has Done For You, and #2 If You Realize You're In Hiding, Receive What Jesus Is Doing In You.

#1 If You Realize You're In Hiding,
Relive What Jesus Has Done For You

(v1-10)

The article started like this:

Fans of *The Flintstones* and cheap, environmentally friendly homes, take heart: cave dwelling is making a comeback. Down in southern Spain, Spaniards and foreigners are buying and refurbishing century-old caves and turning them into modern homes.

In Bisbee, Arizona, the Chulo Canyon Cave House is carved into an outcropping of granite boulder, extending more than 2,000 square feet into a desert grotto. It has all of the good qualities of a cave for living, like maintaining what is called 'rock temperature.' The house never dips below 66 degrees or above 72 degrees.

It wasn't by choice that the Israelites retreated to caves once a year; they were chased. It wasn't to be environmentally friendly; it was to hide from their enemies.

Jdg 6:1 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years,

Jdg 6:2 and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which *are* in the mountains.

We sing, "You're a good, good Father; it's Who you are." Being the best father means meeting disobedience with discipline. In this case, the Midianites were God's paddle to administer the swats.

Instead of crying out to God, the Israelites continued to do evil, and chose to hide from their enemies.

Hiding was hard work; they "**made**... dens... caves... and strongholds." It would have been so much easier to turn to the Lord.

Hiding was a terrible strategy that only prolonged their suffering. Instead of hiding, they needed to pursue holiness; but they stubbornly refused.

As we work through these verses, ask the Lord to show you if there is a hiding place in your life.

Jdg 6:3 So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them.

Jdg 6:4 Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey.

Jdg 6:5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it.

The Midianites, the Amalekites, and the others, were pirates on land. They would arrive, raid, and rape the land, before moving on.

The Lord has overcome the world, by His victory on the Cross and His resurrection and ascension into Heaven. He has not, however, established His full victory yet on the earth; and by that, I mean He has not returned to rule and reign over the earth.

He's going to, at His Second Coming. But for now, Satan is allowed to operate as the god of this world, and, along with his demons, he wants to rob, kill, and destroy. He especially wants to rob **you**; to kill **you**; to destroy **you**.

Why are we such high-value targets? If Satan can get you and I to hide, rather than take our stand on the battlefield, he can continue to hold nonbelievers captive, because we're not there on the front lines to preach the Gospel.

Jdg 6:6 So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.

Finally, after seven hard years, they cried out to the Lord. If you ever think God's discipline is harsh, it's not. Human stubbornness is legendary. God meets disobedience with the exact measure of discipline that is called for.

The thing to notice is that the moment His children cried-out, God responded.

Jdg 6:7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD because of the Midianites,

Jdg 6:8 that the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel...

This is a little different. So far in the Book of Judges, when the people cried-out, God raised-up a military hero. He's going to do that, but this time, first, they got a prophet.

When you cry-out to God, He immediately responds. But it might not be in deliverance. In the age in which we live, His response is likely to be, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (Second Corinthians 12:9).

You're more likely to hear, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory" (Second Corinthians 4:17 KJV).

Jdg 6:8 ... the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage;

There are books I can read over-and-over again. There are movies I've seen dozens of times. At Christmastime, there are stories we've read aloud each year for decades. They have in common that they are great stories told by a great storyteller.

God is the greatest storyteller and one of the stories He loves to tell and retell to the Israelites is that of His mighty power in delivering them from bondage in Egypt in the exodus.

(Of course you understand that by 'story' I mean nonfiction history. It really happened, just as recorded in the Bible).

God did not mightily deliver the Israelites from 400 years of slavery in order for them to become slaves in the Promised Land. His prophet was looking back to remind them of their identity, and of God's intentions.

Jdg 6:9 and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land.

God didn't expend His strength getting them out of Egypt. He didn't retire, leaving it up to them to conquer their enemies in their own strength.

No, He drove out the Canaanites, and gave Israel the land that was rightfully theirs. God used them, for sure; but no one who was at Jericho, or there the day the sun stood still, would attribute any of their victories to the armies of Israel.

God held back the Red Sea, the Jordan River, and even the sun, and He would do the miraculous again for them.

Jdg 6:10 Also I said to you, "I *am* the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.' "

They "[feared] the gods of the Amorites" means that they showed reverential fear toward them - the reverential fear and honor that was due to Jehovah.

We've previously described the gods of Canaan. Baal and Astarte were supposed to be in charge of the weather and the harvest, respectively. But they had to have god-sex in order for the rains to fall and the crops to grow. The priests of Baal taught that their gods needed sex-therapy, so Canaanites went up to high places, where they supposed their gods could better see them; and they had orgies, and engaged in bestiality.

They put-on live hardcore porn shows for their gods. Israelites saw this, and instead of vomiting, wanted in on it.

We've come to verse ten, and so it's time to deliver the application. The Israelites were in hiding, and the Lord's strategy to draw them out and back to obedience was to have them relive His power on their behalf.

It's good for **us** to relive His power on our behalf. I don't want to keep giving my testimony over-and-over, but I can say God was powerful on my behalf.

His Holy Spirit was able to pierce my sinful heart, and talk to me while I was dead in trespasses and sins, while I was a totally depraved person. He freed my will so I could be convicted of sin, and of righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

By God's free gift, by His abundant grace, I was saved. I became a new creation; old things passed away, and all things became new.

It wasn't just for eternity, for Heaven, as great as that is. It was for my life. Since I've been saved, these past 41 years, God has shown Himself powerful in many different ways.

How sad, for me, that I am still prone to hiding. The trials, the troubles, they just keep coming, don't they? In fact they get more sinister, the longer the enemy has to study my life.

Rather than find a cave to retreat to, I need to take a stand, with the weapons of our spiritual warfare.

I'd encourage you to relive God's salvation, His power, in your life. Even if you're not in hiding, reliving what He has done for you is a wonderful discipline to practice.

Your life is a great story that the greatest storyteller is still telling.

#2 If You Realize You're In Hiding, Receive What Jesus Is Doing In You

(v11-24)

I'll tell you right now, burglars are definitely going to toss your bed, to look under your mattress. It's not a very good hiding place.

There are a multitude of simulated objects on the market that are hiding places for small items. By far the weirdest I've seen is a realistic looking head of Iceberg Lettuce, which has a hidden compartment. The manufacturer says, "Thieves will never dream of looking in this head of Iceberg Lettuce. Place it in your refrigerator in the vegetable compartment with your most valuable small items inside for safe keeping."

It's \$99.00 from a retailer named Bim Bam Banana.

As we meet Gideon, he thinks he's found his head of lettuce, to keep him hidden.

Jdg 6:11 Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which *was* in Ophrah, which *belonged* to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites.

The Angel of the Lord is an Old Testament physical appearance of Jesus before His incarnation in a human body. This is at least the third time He has been mentioned in the Book of Judges.

We're not told how long the Angel of the Lord sat there, watching Gideon; but it's clear Gideon wasn't paying very close attention, because he doesn't notice Him until he is greeted by Him.

Jdg 6:12 And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!"

The Lord refers to Gideon as a "mighty man of valor," and in verse fourteen He will send him out saying "Go in this might of yours."

He was anything but that. After we're done working through this section, we're going to return to this as our application. For now, let's see Gideon's story unfold.

Jdg 6:13 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 forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

Gideon verbalized what I believe is the number one complaint people have against God. If He exists, then why does He permit suffering? C.S. Lewis called it the problem of pain. *Where is God When it Hurts?* is the title of Philip Yancey's book on the subject.

Joni Eareckson Tada has written books about God and suffering, like *Making Sense of Suffering*, and, *Where's My Miracle?*

Without our testimony about suffering, the world is left to conclude that God is either all-powerful but unloving, or that He is loving but not all-powerful.

He is, of course, both. He is omnipotent; and He is love. Our answer is that God created man with free will, because love is not love without the freedom to choose. When Adam and Eve exercised their free will to disobey God, it brought into creation exactly what God had warned them about: sin and death.

But ever since that moment, God has been promoting His plan to reconcile mankind, and all of creation, back to Himself. That plan, born of power and love, is the death of Jesus as the God-man on the Cross.

God is not willing that any of our race should perish; He offers eternal life to all. He is longsuffering, waiting for people to choose eternal life.

While His longsuffering waits, terrible things happen in the world. They happen as a result of sin. One day, God will act finally, and decisively, to end suffering.

But when He does, the offer of salvation in Jesus will expire for those who have rejected Him.

Sometimes your suffering is your own fault. Gideon ignored the rebuke of the prophet in his complaint. It was because the Israelites chose to fear Baal and Astarte that the Lord was disciplining them.

Jdg 6:14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

God is not obligated to explain everything to us - especially when He has already given us His Word.

What's great to realize is that the Angel of the Lord sends Gideon in spite of his complaints. God is so incredibly gracious.

You don't need to be in a perfect place for God to use you.

Jdg 6:15 So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father's house."

Not really true. Later in the story we'll see that Gideon had ten servants, and that his dad was a prominent leader in their local community.

He was hiding in the winepress and now he was hiding behind a false humility.

Jdg 6:16 And the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

As Emirel Lagasse would say, "Bam!" Or maybe, "Bim Bam Banana!" What more do you need? A lot, if you're Gideon.

Jdg 6:17 Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me.

Gideon wanted some assurances. We can cut him some slack, not just because the Lord does, but because we often lack assurance, but expect God to be patient with us.

Jdg 6:18 Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set *it* before You." And He said, "I will wait until you come back."

We talk a lot about waiting on the Lord; but do we realize how much the Lord waits for us? Is there something He has asked you to do that you are keeping Him waiting to perform?

Jdg 6:19 So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought *them* out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented *them*.

Jdg 6:20 The Angel of God 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.

Jdg 6:21 Then the Angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that *was* in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

Gideon got his sign, but he lost the sight of the Lord. Be careful what you ask for; or, at least, ask for better things, more spiritual things.

Jdg 6:22 Now Gideon perceived that He *was* the Angel of the LORD. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face."

You can search the Scriptures, but you're not going to find a bigger scaredy cat than Gideon. He apparently thought, superstitiously, that he was going to die. I say he was being superstitious because the Angel of the Lord had appeared other times without any Israelite who saw Him dying.

Jdg 6:23 Then the LORD said to him, "Peace *be* with you; do not fear, you shall not die."

The Lord spoke to Gideon, probably as an audible voice from Heaven. He let him know he wasn't going to die.

I half wonder if Gideon was still looking for an excuse to disobey the Lord? "I'm gonna die; I better get my affairs in order. I guess I won't be able to fight the Midianites."

Jdg 6:24 So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it The-LORD-*is*-Peace. To this day it *is* still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

He regarded that rock upon which the Lord had consumed his offering as an altar. You can regard almost anything in your life as an altar, as you offer yourself to God a living sacrifice.

The Lord said, "Peace be with you," so Gideon named the altar "The-Lord-is-Peace." Gideon thus expresses that his knowledge of the Lord had deepened. He knew his Lord better after this encounter than he had before.

It is always my hope that all of us know the Lord better after our encounters with Him here in His Word at Calvary Hanford.

The altar Gideon dedicated was still standing in the days of Samuel, who we believe is the human author of this God-breathed book.

Gideon was anything but a "mighty man of valor," yet that was how the Lord addressed him. He had no might of his own, but that's how Jesus sent him.

I think it is a mistake to think that the Lord saw Gideon's potential to **become** a mighty man of valor, with the proper training. That's how we always think. We revel in the weakling, or the misfit, whose potential is somehow tapped, rendering him or her a hero.

You can probably think of a dozen feature films in which the main character suffers a defeat, but over time, with intense training by a mentor, he or she returns to be victorious.

Do you see potential in Gideon? The answer is, "No." In fact, he will continue to doubt the Lord. At the end of his life, he will do something that results in setting up an idol.

The Angel of the Lord saw Gideon as a mighty man of valor **because he was one, right then, if he would only realize it.**

He was called to "Go in this might of yours, and... save Israel from the hand of the Midianites" (v14).

What might? "I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man" (v16).

God's calling was God's enabling. Gideon could do it because the Lord had called him to do it, and would therefore empower him to do it.

God wants so much to make this point that He chooses Gideon - the one guy you see zero potential in, whom no amount of training over time could prepare.

What does this mean to us? It means that anything God is calling you to do, or to endure, includes His enabling to do it, or to endure it.

It's not a matter of you having the potential, with more time and training, but of Him empowering you.

I was listening to Pastor Don McClure; watching him live as he was teaching at a pastor's conference. He was touching on some of these same things. He quoted the verse, "He who did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

Think of that. In order to save you, God gave the greatest gift He could give - His Son, Jesus Christ.

How could He not give us everything else, anything else, we require? If He didn't withhold Jesus, why do we ever think He will withhold what we require for our daily living in Christ?

The apostle Peter said you have everything that pertains to life and godliness. *You have it available to you right now.*

Receive what the Lord is doing, you mighty man or woman of valor.

Let Jesus be your only hiding place.