

A HERO WILL RISE

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 7:9-15

Topic

God sends Gideon down to the enemy camp where he overhears two Midianites discussing a prophetic dream in which they are conquered by the Israelites

Title

"The Nightmare Before Conquest"

Introduction

It was an odd headline, enough so that I clicked on the story.
Nurse Accused Of Murder By Bagel.

An unlicensed nurse has been charged with murdering a multiple sclerosis patient by feeding her a piece of bagel and letting her choke to death so she could carry on an affair with the patient's husband.

The nurse told detectives she fed Darlene Amberik a piece of bagel soaked in milk but never intended to kill her.

Fascinated, I found other murders involving bagels:

- In 2007, a Long Island man who gunned down the mother of his four children confessed to police that he shot her over a pair of bagel shops that a court had recently awarded her in their bitter divorce.
- In 2008, a woman was convicted of voluntary manslaughter after what began as an argument with her boyfriend over a cold bagel. Patrice Rogers admitted to police that she stabbed Geno Crenshaw after the couple had an argument over a bagel he'd brought her. She didn't eat it because she said it was cold, which prompted him to become upset that she was ungrateful. She said he began hitting her from behind. She stabbed him once with a backhanded motion with a kitchen knife, puncturing his heart.

Something like a bagel plays a prominent, and fatal, role in our story. Gideon went down to the camp of the enemy. We read,

Jdg 7:13 And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: *To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread* tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed."

Jdg 7:14 Then his companion answered and said, "This *is* nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp."

We'll see in subsequent studies that this prediction comes true, as Gideon and his 300-man unarmed-army overcomes 135,000 enemy troops.

Down in the enemy camp, Gideon discovered that God had a good work for him to perform. Gideon heard that God has foreordained victory. All he needed to do was stand and watch the deliverance the Lord had promised.

You've undoubtedly heard it said of the two testaments in the Bible, that "the New is in the Old contained, and the Old is in the New explained."

That being the case, we should look for New Testament precepts and principles to be illustrated in Old Testament stories. What we've just said about Gideon reminds us of a great promise to us in the New Testament:

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Gideon was "God's workmanship," a work in progress, made possible by the promise of the coming Savior, Jesus Christ. In the camp of the Midianites, Gideon discovered the good works God had prepared beforehand for him.

Now that we know what we're looking for, we can apply it to ourselves as we consider the good works God has prepared for us.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Will Strengthen You To Perform The Good Works He Has Prepared For You, and #2 The Good Works God Has Prepared For You Cannot Fail If Performed In His Strength.

#1 God Will Strengthen You To Perform The Good Works He Has Prepared For You

(v9-11)

All over town, there are yard signs announcing on-going construction projects. Whether it's a roofing company in a residential neighborhood, or a construction firm in a commercial zone, the contractor wants everyone to know his crew is at work.

A Christian is the "workmanship" of the Creator of the universe. In fact the universe itself, in all its microcosmic and macrocosmic splendor, was only created in order to provide an environment within which God could create mankind. The current earth and stellar heavens will one day be consumed, to be replaced by new ones. The men and women with whom God has been dealing since the Garden of Eden will go on forever.

God began His workmanship on us and has promised He will complete it. His goal is to transform us into the image of Jesus:

- The apostle John said, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (First John 3:2).
- The apostle Paul said, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (Second Corinthians 3:18).
- Paul also said we were "predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). We take that to mean not that certain men and women are predestined to be saved, while others are

not, but to mean that, once you are saved, you are destined to become like Jesus.

You're like one of those yard signs, in that God lets the world know He is at work through you. He is excited about what He's doing, and wants everyone to know.

Construction projects, especially big ones, follow plans that have been discussed and approved in advance. One of the things we are told about God's workmanship in our lives is that He has planned good works for us to discover and to perform in His strength.

As one commentary put it, "The purpose of these prepared-in-advance works is not "to *work* in them" but "to *walk* in them.""

In other words, God has prepared a path of good works for believers which He will perform *in* and *through* them as they walk by faith. This does not mean doing a work for God; instead, it is God's performing His work in and through believers.

Any confusion about how this happens is cleared-up by looking at Gideon as an illustration of discovering the good works God has prepared in advance.

If you are not familiar with the story thus far: It's a time in Israel's history where they are disobeying God, and worshipping idols. Every man was doing what was right in his own eyes. Every so often, God raised up a judge - we would call him or her a "hero." The judge was empowered by God to deliver Israel from her enemies, and hopefully restore worship of Jehovah.

The Israelites had been oppressed and subjected by the Midianites and their allies for seven years. The Angel of the Lord found Gideon hiding, but nevertheless called him a "mighty man of valor." That's because He knew the good works He had in store for Gideon to discover, and to perform, in God's strength.

Gideon had blown a trumpet, rallying 32,000 Israelites to join his army. God said they were too many in order for Him to get the glory, so He whittled Gideon's army down to 300 men. It's hard to call them soldiers, since they had no weapons or armor, and no training.

As we pick-up the story, God was ready to execute His conquest over the Midianites.

Jdg 7:9 It happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand.

God starts with the finish. Go, because I've already delivered the enemy into your hand; the victory is already won.

There's no talk of "how" to go, or "how" the victory is to be achieved. Just go - start out for the Midianite camp.

In a future situation, facing a great enemy force, one of the Bible's true heroes, Jonathan, is described this way:

1Sa 14:6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few."

1Sa 14:7 So his armorbearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart."

Jonathan 'got it.' Just go, and see what the Lord will do. After all, it is His work, not yours.

Remember when they were rivals, running for vice-president, and Dan Quayle said to Lloyd Benson that, even though he lacked experience, he was like a young John Kennedy? Benson uttered a classic, debate-winning comment when he said, "Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy."

Gideon was no Jonathan. What about me? Am I more like Jonathan, or Gideon? What about you?

We of course want to be more like Jonathan. Whether we are or not, God has set before all of us good works to make us more like Jesus.

Being a Gideon is no excuse. As Cher said to Nicolas Cage in *Moonstruck*, "Snap out of it!" God is working in and through **each of us**, all the time.

Jdg 7:10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant,

God was so patient with Gideon. Reluctant and doubting, God worked with the young man, rather than moving on to someone else who was more Jonathan-like.

God's patience with Gideon is intended to reinforce that He who began a good work in us will complete it. For his part, Gideon made it harder for God. But God was committed to His workmanship.

Obviously I need to show godly patience toward you; and you towards me. We can't simply overlook one another, and move on to someone more mature. We're in this together, maturing at different rates of spiritual speed.

Even if you are what could be considered a mature believer, you still have areas of immaturity, and stubbornness, and sin in your life. To paraphrase Yogi Berra, "You ain't finished til you're finished."

God suggests Gideon take "Purah," his servant. This is the only mention of Purah; here and in verse eleven.

God sends with Gideon a servant to encourage him. Purah might therefore be a type of God the Holy Spirit. He is described as a servant Who encourages us by coming alongside of us, to help us.

Whether we are meant to see the Holy Spirit or not (I think so), we know that, in our case, He permanently indwells us, and He can constantly infill us. Jesus said He would never leave us or forsake us, and He fulfills that promise with the gift of the Holy Spirit in us, and coming upon us.

God told Gideon, "if you're afraid, go...". He didn't tell him to repent of his fear; He didn't tell him to get counseling for his fear.

He told Gideon to do something that almost seemed more fear-filled, to go with only one other Israelite towards the enemy, instead of his army of 300.

He wasn't even telling Gideon to "Fear not," as God often does in the Bible, but only to trust and obey.

Fear is very real, but it shouldn't stop you from walking with the Lord. "Fear not" is a promise you can always claim, but whether you hear God say it or not, keep walking with Him.

Jdg 7:11 and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who *were* in the camp.

Gideon was going to receive intel about the enemy that would serve to strengthen him.

We have a fierce, malevolent enemy in Satan. He's not alone in his opposition to us, but is aided by an army of fallen angels.

He's the god of this world, and he designs the world system in a way to defeat us, and to destroy us.

And did I mention that even though we are saved, and born-again, we still have the flesh to contend with? We find within us the impulse and the propensity to satisfy our human appetites in sinful ways.

The intel we receive from reading the Bible is good, and it ought to strengthen us. For example, we're told that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us.

We've been clothed by the Holy Spirit in a spiritual armor that can easily withstand the principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, and the spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

We're told that we have been crucified with, died with, and raised with, Jesus - spiritually speaking - so that we are dead to sin, and can thereby always yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit, and not our flesh.

Looking forward, we see the final incarceration of the devil, his followers both angelic and human. We see the new earth, the new heavens, the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem - that great Golden City within which Jesus is building our eternal mansions.

I guess what I'm saying is that God has given us insight into the future similar to what He did for Gideon. We may not see the immediate future; we may not see the good works God has planned for us to discover tomorrow. But we see our ultimate future, with its sure promise we will be completed, finished, transformed.

One commentator said, "God prepares us **for good works**. He prepares **good works** for us to perform. Then He rewards us when we perform them. Such is His grace!"

#2 The Good Works God Has Prepared For You Cannot Fail If Performed In His Strength

(v12-15)

Comparing God to a contractor is somewhat dicey in that contractors have such a terrible reputation. A few bad ones seem

to spoil it for the rest. Almost everyone who has ever hired contractors has some horror story.

I don't need to point out that God is not like that. Regardless our impatience with Him, He is never late to the job site, and His projects are finished on schedule. We can't always see it, but what He is building is always perfectly crafted and, as we've said repeatedly, it will come to completion in eternity.

Gideon overheard the good work he was about to perform:

Jdg 7:12 Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.

The Midianites were the main oppressors, but these others took advantage. Doesn't it seem that when you're in a trial, everything starts going wrong? Satan is definitely a kick-you-while-you're-down fighter.

We keep getting clues to how overwhelming the odds were against Gideon:

- It was the Midianites, plus many others.
- Together their number was like a locust plague on the land. They were like the grains of sand on a beach.
- They had camels. It's not just an observation. Camels were war animals. By that I mean they were used in battle. Riding their camels, the enemies of Israel would crush them.

I've pointed this out before in our studies in Judges, but we need to realize that, as Christians, we are always outnumbered, and

out gunned, by the supernatural enemies that we face. Alone we are no match for any of their attacks.

This is one reason it is so important to be in fellowship with other believers:

- You are a member of the earthly body of Jesus; a disembodied member lacks life-giving nourishment.
- You are a living stone in the household of faith; a misplaced, unused stone leaves both you and the church vulnerable.

Jdg 7:13 And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: *To my surprise*, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed."

Bread made from barley grain isn't something to copy, as if it is some secret nutritional component to a new fad diet derived from the Bible. It was often the food of animals, but lately it was all the Israelites had left when the Midianites finished with them.

The barley bread represented Israel at its lowest point. The tent in the dream obviously referred to the nomadic Midianites and their allies.

What destroys the tent? Not a hurricane; not a cyclone; not an earthquake, or a tornado, or a brush fire, or a plague, or a rockslide, or a bolt of lightning, or a tidal wave, or an avalanche.

Not an angel, either. No, it was a barley loaf. Not a big, oversized loaf, either. If you want to get the idea here, think of a bagel. (Kosher, of course).

You'd think the Midianites would crack-up at this. They did not; they took it very seriously.

Jdg 7:14 Then his companion answered and said, "This *is* nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp."

Ever since the Exodus from Egypt, Israel's enemies were afraid of Israel's God. When Joshua sent spies to reconnoiter Jericho, Rahab told them,

Jos 2:9 ... "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you.

Jos 2:10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

Jos 2:11 And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath."

In Deuteronomy the Israelites were promised:

Deu 7:17 "If you should say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?' -

Deu 7:18 you shall not be afraid of them, *but* you shall remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt:

Deu 7:19 the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the

LORD your God brought you out. So shall the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.

Deu 7:20 Moreover the LORD your God will send the hornet among them until those who are left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed.

Deu 7:21 You shall not be terrified of them; for the LORD your God, the great and awesome God, *is* among you.

Commentators are disagreed over whether the reference to "the hornet" is literal or figurative. I think it's a figure for whatever God decided to send against the enemies of Israel. All the plagues in Egypt were, in that sense, "the hornet."

But so was the Angel of the Lord, Who often appeared to Israel, and Who was guiding Gideon in this fight.

Do you realize that your enemies are afraid of the Lord? When Jesus was on the earth, the demons He encountered were terrified of Him. In the Book of James, we're told that demons "tremble" at Jesus (2:19).

William Cowper is credited with the quote, "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon their knees."

Part of our problem believing that our enemies tremble is that so much of this happens in the spiritual realm we cannot see. Let me illustrate.

In the Book of Second Kings, the king of Syria sent a great army out against God's prophet, Elisha. His servant was afraid. Here's the story:

2Ki 6:15 And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

2Ki 6:16 So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them."

2Ki 6:17 And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2Ki 6:18 So when *the Syrians* came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

Whether it's angels watchin' over me, every move I make, or some other thing, greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.

The twist is that we live in an age, in a spiritual dispensation, when God's strength is revealed most effectively by our weakness. In the Book of Acts, when Stephen was surrounded and about to be martyred, he didn't strike God's enemies with blindness. Instead, he was supernaturally enabled to see Heaven open. The impact of God's grace upon him as he was killed was incalculable in its spiritual effect.

Indeed, we're told that Saul (who we know as the apostle Paul) was there as a nonbeliever. The indication is that God used the scene to begin opening Paul's eyes to the power of the Gospel to salvation.

Back to Gideon... BTW, what an amazing providence that in a camp of 135,000 men as numerous as locusts and grains of sand, Gideon went right to the place he could overhear two specific men discussing the nightmare.

Whether news spread from this one dream, or whether others also dreamed it, the camp of the enemy was afraid.

Jdg 7:15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand."

I can only wonder if Gideon named his army *The Barley Brigade*, or *The Band of Bagels*. I'm guessing not.

Gideon should not have needed assurance. He could have simply trusted the Word of God. But God condescended, in grace, to Gideon's lack of faith, and to his fear, in order to encourage him.

We already have tremendous assurances in the completed Word of God. We should thus not expect God to show us proof of what He is going to do; we can trust Him to accomplish His work in and through us.

His work, done in His power, simply cannot fail.

Our part is to believe Him, and to obey Him. In the Book of Ephesians, where we are described as God's workmanship, and where we are told to discover the works God has ordained, chapter four begins with the apostle Paul saying, "I, therefore, the

prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called..."

The rest of the book amplifies what it means to "walk worthy." It sets forth how we are to yield, empowered by the indwelling and the infilling of God the Holy Spirit.

It isn't so much about what we must do for God, as it shows what we can do through Him. It is the good works He has before ordained that we should walk in them.

Are you indwelt by God the Holy Spirit? You are if you're a believer. If not, the Holy Spirit is convicting you of sin... And of righteousness... And of the coming judgment.

You say you are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit? Then ask for His constant infilling in order that you might discover and perform the good works that are transforming you, from glory to glory, into the likeness of Jesus.