**Gideon**

In the movie Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House, Cary Grant as Jim Blandings talks his wife into buying a country house in Connecticut so they can move from their overcrowded apartment in Manhattan. His wife’s more modest plan was to remodel their apartment at a much lower cost than a house. They select a home on a large tract of land and pay far in excess of the sales price. When the house is found to be structurally unsound, he refuses to admit defeat. Instead he has the house torn down then makes a series of bad decisions during the course of building a new home on the property. At every turn, he sees himself as the victim of circumstances rather than realizing his original idea was a mistake. In our study of Judges chapter 6, we see the Israelites once again suffering at the hands of the Canaanites. Rather than confessing their sins, they see the cause of their plight as being the brutality of the Midianites.

The chapter begins as chapter 4 did with the Israelites doing evil in the eyes of God. Because of their sin, God subjected them to rule by the Midianites for 7 years. The Midianites oppressed them so severely that they were forced to hide out in rocks and caves. Their crops and livestock were stolen by the marauding bands. God had told the Israelites generations earlier that they would reap what they had not sown and live in houses they did not build, prophecy that they would enjoy the fruits of the land He gave them. In an ironic twist, the Canaanites were reaping what they had not sown as the preyed on Israel. In verse 7 we see the Israelites crying out to God because of the Midianites (see 10:10, Num. 21:7 and 1st Sam. 7:6).

God’s response was to send them a prophet through whom He rebuked the people. He told them that He had taken them out of bondage in Egypt and given them the land in Canaan but they had not listened to Him and had worshipped the local gods. The name of the prophet is not revealed but the brief address to the people was to point out their sin and lead them to repentance. After the prophet appeared, God sent the angel of the Lord to appear to Gideon whom he found threshing grain, not in an open threshing floor but in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. This is another preincarnate appearance of Jesus, this time in a visible body that sat under a tree and spoke directly to Gideon. He said that the Lord was with *him* and called him a mighty warrior. Gideon responded by asking “if the Lord is with *us*, why has all this happened to us”. He also claimed that God had abandoned them. Jesus told him to go in the strength he had to save Israel from Midian and that He was sending him. In a similar fashion to Moses when initially called by God, Gideon said that he was the weakest of a weak family. Jesus promised to go with him and enable him to strike down the Midianites. Gideon then asked for a sign that he was really talking to God. He prepared an offering which Jesus caused to be consumed by fire, after which He disappeared. Gideon knew that he had seen God face to face and assumed he would die but was reassured by Jesus that he would not. Gideon built an altar to God to commemorate what had happened.

Next God instructed Gideon to tear down his father’s altar and Asherah pole and use the wood to prepare a burnt offering of a bull. Gideon did as he was told but during the night so his actions would not be seen by his family or the men in his town. When the demolished altar to Baal was discovered the following day and it was determined that Gideon was responsible, the men of the town demanded he be brought forth to be executed. Gideon’s father, perhaps emboldened by his son’s courage, told the men that if Baal was really a god then he could defend himself. Matthew Henry wrote “Many that have not courage enough to keep their integrity themselves yet have so much conscience left as makes them love and esteem those that do. Gideon’s actions resulted in his being named Jerub-Baal, meaning let Baal contend with him.

Next the Midianites, Amalekites and other clans joined forces and descended on the valley of Jezreel. It may have been a response to the destruction of an altar to their false god or it could have been another raiding party to steal crops from Israel. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he sent messengers to Manasseh, Asher, Zebulon and Naphtali calling men to arms.

The chapter closes with the well known story of Gideon asking for a sign from God by placing a wool fleece on the ground. As he asked, the fleece was covered with dew but the ground surrounding it was dry. Gideon next asked for another sign which God provided by keeping the fleece dry while covering the ground with dew. Some have called this symbolic of the first calling of Israel (wet fleece) followed by their rejection of Jesus (dry fleece) and calling of the Gentiles (wet ground). It is remarkable that Gideon would be so impertinent as to ask for a second confirmation (see Gen. 41:2) but it demonstrates that his faith was weak. God’s response shows His patience and grace. The propriety of asking God for a sign is difficult to determine. There are other examples in the Old Testament of men who asked for a sign which was granted (see Gen. 24:14 and Ex. 4:1). On the other hand Jesus said that a wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign (see Matt. 16:4) but he also was patient with Thomas who asked for a sign (see John 20:27). Ray Pritchard wrote an excellent sermon on the subject of asking God for a sign.

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