

As Jesus gazed at each of his disciples in the boat, he exclaimed with *Why are you afraid, you of little faith!* He then stilled the storm with a rebuke and they were absolutely amazed, wondering what sort of man he was that even the wind and waves obeyed him. The apostles were frightened. The chosen leaders that he was encouraging and training, thought they would die. They tried hard on their own, then woke him up to warn him before he too drowned with them.

Do you like your leaders being afraid? Some people want strong leaders who have a steely fearlessness. But God rarely gives us those. Mostly our leaders go through times of great fear, times of doubt, and times of wanting assurance.

The Israelites were about to have a leader like that in Judges 6-8. They'd been suffering greatly under the fists of the Midianites, with added head-kicks from the Amelekites and others.

Instead of simply demanding tributes, or regular raids, these 2 tyrants had a policy of deliberately starving the Israelites. They refused to let the Israelites have any flocks or herds, and whenever they planted crops, swarms of camels would be ridden through the land to trample and eat.

God promised Abraham in Genesis 22:17, that his descendants would be as many as the sands on the shore or the stars in the sky. But now the camels were in that class. Life in the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, was impossible. People hid their crops and secretly harvested them, knowing that the penalties were very harsh for growing food, yet not growing it meant death.

After 7 years, people prayed to God for help. He sent a prophet, who reminded them of what God had done, and how they had turned from Him.

Then God sent a messenger to a young man, from the tribe of Manasseh. The angel said *The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior.* Yet at that time, Gideon was no mighty warrior. He was hiding in a wine press, threshing some wheat, afraid of the Midianites.

But it could be that Gideon had the mettle to be a resistance leader, and to rid the plague of the Midianites from the land. Would he be a man? Would he be the strong mighty warrior God said? Or would he cower like Barak had in chapter 4?

As we hear his first words, alarm bells start ringing. This mighty warrior does not have a firm basis of faith. Instead of trusting God, he blames God for the bad situation they live in. He says in 6:13 *But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian.*

The prophet's message had finished with God saying *But you have not given heed to my voice.* Gideon showed that he had not. To him, God was a poor deliverer, who may have acted in the past, but lately... nothing! Gideon accused God of abandoning them, blaming God for the problems, not realizing that they were suffering because they had abandoned God.

As the Lord directs him to take baby steps towards victory, Gideon shows he is scared. He argues that he cannot do it.

He is from the wrong family... he is weak... he wants a sign from God that he is really real. It is not your God-fearing, faithful warrior on view.

The baby steps means that we have 3 campaigns, not one decisive battle.

In the 1<sup>st</sup>, at night to avoid detection, Gideon vandalises the local idols and sets up an altar to God. People are furious. His community wants to kill this vandal who destroyed Baal's altar, cut down the asherah pole and then burnt an offering to the Lord. But as God promised, Gideon was protected and then given a 2<sup>nd</sup> task.

His new task was to raise an army to attack the Midianites. But again this mighty warrior balked. He wanted more proof. He again put God to the test, and not just once, but twice. Some encourage Christians to seek guidance from God by doing what Gideon did, laying out a fleece. But the story certainly shows Gideon's actions in a negative light. His weakness of faith is on view, not a directive for getting guidance.

Yet God perseveres with him and he is almost ready with 32,000 men to face off against 135,000 Midianites. The odds aren't good, about 1 to 4, but God isn't happy. He knows that his people will claim the victory from their own power if the odds stay at

that rate. He wants to make it much more convincing. So the number of Israelites is dropped in 2 steps to 300. Now the odds are 1 Israelite to 450 Midianites.

Gideon was the commander to carry out his orders, but God was the architect, engineer and rescuer. Only God could save his people.

But Gideon was not happy. He was still scared and unsure. So God told him to spy on the enemy. If he was really scared, he could take a servant with him.

So the 2 men sneaked off and overheard a conversation about a dream, in which the Midianites said that Gideon would defeat them.

Now he was ready! As directed by God, his 300 men armed themselves with a light, a jar and a trumpet. As directed, in the middle of the night, with the noise and light, the Midianites panicked and killed each other. God rescued his people, but some of the enemy fled.

So the 3<sup>rd</sup> campaign was to kill the 2 tyrannical kings. Judges 8 details this, yet at the same time, Gideon himself turns into a tyrant. His handling of communities is not good, with revenge attacks and total destructions.

And to make matters worse, this weak man bullied, harassed and lorded it over his own people to get his own way. He then got them to donate gold, and made a huge gold idol in the very spot where he had destroyed the idol to Baal. He forced all Israel to worship his idol. He married many women and fathered 70 children. One of his concubines bore him a son named Abimelech, who would create many problems and heart aches for the next generation.

The spiral of life in Judges is groaning to a stop. By the end of Gideon's life, we're left wondering how long God will let this go on. Yet it is only chapter 8... more next week!

As Jesus taught his apostles, he commanded them and each Christian leader, to step out in faith with him! But we are not to lord it over others. We are to remember that He is with us, not only to guide and direct, but also to fill us with love and care. Gideon shows us a scared man who kept dragging his toes when God said "go" but who went too far and abused his position. Keep praying for our leaders.