

A Bible Adventure

Edition 04

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A Pitcher, a Torch, and the Sword of the Lord

A retelling of Judges 6–7

It was a sad time for Israel. They were already living in the Promised Land, but the situation had become unbearable as the people struggled to survive under their enemies' constant onslaughts.

Because the Israelites worshipped false gods and idols and did not drive out the perverse and evil heathen from the land, God Himself had allowed the cruel Midianites and Amalekites to rise up against them.

"Seven years of pillaging our crops!" Joash said to his neighbor Rachamim, whose fields bordered the Abiezrite lands. "And not only our grain,

but our cattle, sheep, and donkeys as well!"

"We cannot expect less," Rachamim muttered. "We know that we—the people of Israel—are to blame."

Joash sighed. "It is true. God, through His prophet, has told us these Midianite raids are due to our sins and worshipping Baal. It is a shameful thing we have done, and it has brought us nothing but misery."

Rachamim nodded pensively. "We must repent," he said, "and hope that God will have mercy on us."

"I agree," said Joash. "We cannot survive these raids much longer."

One day, Joash's youngest son, Gideon, was threshing the wheat his older brother had dropped off an hour ago. Gideon liked this time of quiet when his hands were busy, but his mind was free to reminisce about when Israel was peaceful and prosperous. He longed for that time again, a time when he and his family were not continually trying to evade the Midianites.

"It's safer for you stay near the house," Gideon's brother had told him. "Bringing the wheat in from the fields so you can thresh it at home means less

chance of encountering roving Midianite bandits."

As he was contemplating, Gideon suddenly heard a quiet but authoritative voice behind him say, "The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor!"

Gideon dropped the wheat he had been threshing. He turned and immediately knew that this man was holy—an angel of the Lord.

Almost uncontrollably, the frustration of the past seven years upon which Gideon had just been reflecting burst out. "If God is with us, as you say, why has all this trouble come upon us? And where are all the miracles our fathers told us of?"

The angel's countenance remained serene. "God has sent me to tell you that you will save Israel from the Midianites," he said.

Gideon blinked and shook his head. Had he heard correctly? How could this angel expect *him* to do such a thing?

"My lord," he said. "How can I save Israel? My family is the poorest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the youngest of my family."

"God will be with you," the angel replied, "and you will defeat the Midianites as quickly as one man."

Gideon wanted to believe the angel's words, but he needed assurance. *I must ask God for a sign that will prove I am the one God will use to deliver Israel*, he thought.

"If I have found favor in your sight, please give me a sign," he said. "Wait while I prepare an offering for you."

"I will wait," the angel replied.

Gideon prepared an offering of a young goat and unleavened cakes and brought it to the angel, who ordered him to place his offering on a rock. Gideon did so, and the angel touched the meat and the cakes with his staff. Immediately fire flared and consumed Gideon's offering. Then the angel disappeared.

"I have truly seen an angel sent from God!" Gideon said as he fell to his knees.

That night, Gideon again heard God say to him, "Tear down your father's altar to Baal and build an altar dedicated to Me beside it."

Gideon was frightened but determined and enlisted ten of his father's servants to help him. The next morning the townspeople awoke to find Baal's altar demolished and an altar to God with a newly sacrificed bullock on the top.

"Who did this?" the villagers enquired.

"It was Joash's son, Gideon," someone said.

Cries of outrage came from those who still worshipped Baal, and an angry crowd made their way to Joash's house and stood outside it. Although many of the Israelites who had heard the prophet's message had begun to repent, others still worshipped Baal.

"Gideon must die for tearing down the holy altar of Baal!" they cried.

Joash, who had repented of his Baal worship, addressed the mob. "Are you really pleading Baal's cause? If Baal truly *is* a god and is angry about that altar, he will do something about it himself. He doesn't need *your* help!"

The crowd then dispersed.

Shortly after this, Gideon sent out messengers to rally the

men of Israel to make war against their evil enemies. Many were talking of the young man who would deliver Israel. Men from all quarters began to join Gideon's ranks until he had an army of 32,000. Gideon again asked God for a sign.

"I will place a fleece of wool on the ground," Gideon said to Him, "and if there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that what You have promised will come to pass—that You will deliver the Midianites into my hand."

When Gideon rose up early the next morning, though the surrounding ground was dry, he wrung a bowlful of dew out of the fleece. God had performed the miracle just as Gideon has petitioned.

But Gideon, possibly feeling the responsibility of an entire nation's fate resting on his young shoulders, prayed for another confirmation.

“Do not be angry, Lord,” he said. “But please let me ask You just once more—this time, make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.”

That night, God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry while the ground was wet with morning dew.

The next morning, Gideon’s army set out toward the north, where the Midianites camped in a valley beside the hill of Moreh. As they arrived at the spring of Harod, God spoke to Gideon.

“The people with you are too many for Me to have them win this battle,” God said. “Lest Israel boast and say, ‘My own strength has saved me,’ go and announce that anyone who is fearful and afraid may return home.”

Having seen the signs God had performed, Gideon’s confidence in God was firm. Gideon gave God’s message to the army, and shortly afterwards, 22,000 men left—over two-thirds of his forces!

But that was only the first test.

“The people are still too many,” the Lord said to Gideon. “Bring them down to the waters’ edge and I will test them there.”

And so, when the men went to drink beside the water, the Lord told Gideon to send home every man who knelt down and drank with his mouth in the water, but to choose for battle only the soldiers who remained alert and lapped the water from one hand to drink.

Out of the 10,000 who passed the first test, only three hundred men passed the second. That was 31,700 men sent home, while the Midianites had over 100,000 men!

Gideon then ordered his remaining three hundred to gather the extra provisions, water pots, and all the trumpets from those men whom he had sent home. The small army then moved to the highlands overlooking the valley where the camp of the Midianites lay sleeping.

“If you are afraid to attack,” God said to Gideon, “go with your servant Phurah down to the enemy camp, and listen to what they say. Afterwards you will be strengthened.”

And so, as Gideon and Phurah neared one of the tents on the outskirts of the Midianite encampment, they heard a soldier whispering to a fellow comrade, “I had this strange dream about a loaf of barley bread tumbling down into our camp and hitting our tent,” he said. “And it knocked it flat!”

“This could be nothing else but the sword of Gideon, the Israelite,” the other soldier replied, “God has delivered the allied forces of Midian into his hand.”

Filled with courage, Gideon returned to his awaiting men.

“Arise!” he said to his elite band of three hundred. “The Lord has

delivered the armies of Midian into our hands.”

God then told Gideon to give each man a trumpet, a torch, and an empty pitcher. At the right moment, they were to light the torch and hide it inside the pitcher. Under cover of darkness, Gideon placed his men in three companies surrounding the camp of the Midianites. Then, in the middle of the night, at Gideon’s signal, every man broke his pitcher, revealing his flaming torch, and blew his trumpet. Then they all shouted at the top of their voices, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!”

At the ensuing din, the startled Midianites awoke and many turned on each other in their confusion and fear, and many more fled, deserting the camp. The victory was won as God had promised!

See “Heroes of the Bible: Gideon” for more on this fascinating Bible character.