

Judges 08-03-14a

This is Friday, the 14th of March, 2008. We're in the book of Judges. I'm much more confident of where I am book-wise than I am time-wise.

This is Friday, the 14th, March, 2008. Judges, Chapter 6. We're looking at the story of Gideon. We've just placed a single toe in that water so far, but we're going to get much more fully into it this evening.

We'll take a moment, as is our custom, to pause and ensure that we each individually have the opportunity to recognize the importance in the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, to acknowledge that in prayer to God, and to prepare ourselves for concentration and meditation on God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we have assembled once again as believers of like mind who share an enthusiasm for the truth of your Word and a recognition of its importance and its great power in our lives. We thank you for it.

We thank you for the opportunity to fellowship together in it, and we ask your blessing on us as we do so. In Jesus' name, amen. Our perusal of the book of Judges has brought us to Chapter 6. You may remember that after the victory by the Israelite army under Barak, in Israel they might call him Barak, but we'll call him Barak, just so that it's not confusing, and Deborah, we saw the song of Deborah, and the point of that song goes to the point of the whole story, which is the importance of those who have authority, those who have accountability and responsibility, stepping up and exercising it, being faithful and being diligent to fulfill those duties as unto the Lord.

And each of us has duties, each of us has responsibilities, each of us has authority at a bare minimum over our own soul. We are captain of our own ship and master of our own fate. God has made great provision, but God has not foreordained.

God has not predestined the course of our lives. Our destiny is shaped by our decisions. Our decisions should be informed by God's Word.

Our decisions should be made in the light of God's Word as we perceive its truth, as we prayerfully seek God's will. We know that there are many deceptions. If you look around the world today, it is scary to see the power of human self-delusion.

It is one of the most frightening things that I observe on a regular basis. In just various areas, you read in the press, you watch coverage of events, and you see things happen. You see people, when you look at their decisions and you look at what they have done, you think, how could anybody in their right mind have done this? Well, nearly everybody is in their right mind, and all of us do things like this.

We've had individuals leave high state government office in the last week, having built a reputation for integrity and building up what is right there in the state of New York as governor

and cracking down on crime and people who are willfully breaking the law in a lot of areas that are impinging on moral issues. And then the individual himself is just guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty. And from the outside, we look and we say, my goodness, that's just incredibly, how could anybody possibly? Well, that's the scary thing.

We see the same thing in the pages of the Word of God. People who ought to know better, people that you would think have no excuse for not knowing better. All of us have the capacity to turn off our inner compass.

All human beings have a moral compass that they refer to and consult from time to time. We can break that compass. We can distort that compass.

I've told you the story many times about when I first went to Lebanon and I was going out in the field to where the Lebanese artillery batteries were in place. And, of course, Beirut is a very large city. It's got suburbs.

And some of these batteries were actually in place within civilization, in occupied areas, in neighborhoods and in vacant lots and so on. And I went to one battery in particular that had been firing regularly across the city into the enemy-occupied areas and right on the border of their own area. And many times they had caused casualties with friendly fire.

That's kind of an oxymoron, friendly fire. But they had fired on their own people and had hurt people they didn't intend to hurt and had hit targets they didn't intend to hit. And when I went there, their aiming circle, which looks a little bit like this tripod on a much larger scale, and it's got a thing where you do azimuth and you take bearings and you orient the thing to magnetic north and you make corrections.

And that's how you orient the entire battery. All of those tubes know which way they're pointing based on the aiming circle. And the aiming circle is oriented in one of two or three methods, the most common one being the magnetic needle that is built in.

Well, they had set up their aiming circle right next to a great giant power pole. And there were hundreds of amps of electricity flowing through this. Well, anybody that knows the uniform right-hand rule, if current is flowing this way, there's a magnetic field going this way.

And the needle was deflected about 17 mils, which is there's a lot more mils in a circle than there are degrees. But suffice it to say, it significantly skewed everything. And they thought they were firing in one direction, and they couldn't understand why.

Well, we've laid the battery over and over. We've double-checked all of our stakes. And every time we shoot, why, we blow up the wrong thing.

And I stepped out of the vehicle. I walked over, talked to the battery commander. We walked.

I said, where's your aiming circle? And when we walked over there, here's this great giant

bundle of power cables running up this pole about four feet from the aiming circle. I thought, hmm, so did you lay this battery magnetic? Oh, yes, we lay the battery magnetic. We lay many times, many times.

Well, anyway, you want your compass to be correct. And it's a scary thing because when you see people make really egregiously bad decisions that have huge repercussions, life-changing. Teenagers can make life-changing bad choices.

Young adults, middle adults, older adults can make life-changing bad decisions. Bad for you, bad for people around you. And we have come to rely on our inner voice that tells us what we're doing is right or what we're doing is wrong.

Sometimes the thing fires late, and we do a thing, and then we immediately feel guilty. We say, oh, I have just let my tongue get the better of me. I've let my temper get the better of me.

I've done something silly. But we usually know, and we trust that inner sense of what is right and what is wrong. But there are times for you and for me and certainly for people out in the world that don't have any spiritual life going where there is no information coming from that inner center of navigation.

And there is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. It can be operational death. It can be spiritual death.

It can be fruitlessness death. It can be actual physical death. But it's a scary thing.

This chapter that we have just finished, this episode with Deborah and her song, talks about those princes, those who are in authority, and they think that they're doing right. They don't wake up in the morning rubbing their hands together and twisting the ends of their mustache saying, what evil can I do today? People think that they're doing right. We rationalize.

We convince ourselves. And sometimes we don't even convince ourselves. It's just our corrupt inner compass doesn't work.

It has not been refined. It hasn't been activated. It hasn't been corrected by the Word of God.

And we do things that seem right. And we can't understand why someone is upset. And we can't understand why it turned out badly.

It just didn't seem like there was anything wrong. It's a scary thing. You see it in the princes.

And we're going to see it as we go through this next section of Judges. And I call it a section because the story of Gideon is the most detailed story in the entire book of Judges. This thing is going to span several chapters.

It's going to be chapter 6, chapter 7, chapter 8, and chapter 9 as we get into his son. That's four entire chapters out of this book. It's not 20% of the book.

It's a lot. This story is told in great detail, and there's a reason. We didn't get a whole lot of detail on Shamgar, did we? We didn't get a whole lot of detail on even Othniel.

Because those first few episodes, Othniel in particular, we don't have to get detail. We don't need detail. We know why he prevailed.

We know what his attitude was. It's these later digressions and downfalls that are given in more detail because it informs us. It warns us.

It informs our inner voice and our moral compass so that we should not make the same kind of mistake. That's why we study the Word of God. For heaven's sake, let's learn from somebody else's mistakes and not repeat them.

Let's be creative and inventive and come up with brand-new mistakes that have never been seen in the history of the world and not repeat these time and hopefully very small ones and very easily corrected ones. But what a judgment it will be on us to stand before God and He say, when you studied the book of Judges, did you not see the principle? Was it not explained? Did you not spend time meditating on this and incorporating it into your soul? How could you have made this error? Why did you go down this road? Why did you make this set of decisions when the Word of God clearly illustrates the folly of that path and how it can happen? So we want to pay close attention because this is the standard against which we will be measured. If you take a test in school and you fail the test and you go up to the teacher and say, I don't understand why I got such a bad grade.

And the teacher says, Well, you see this? Yeah, I didn't know the answer to that question. I don't remember us covering that in class. Well, here's the class notes.

Here's the book. Do you see where there's three paragraphs in your book on this very issue? It was a simple question if you had only studied. Hopefully we will not be spending that kind of time at the judgment seat of Christ with some 17th level angel explaining, well, here's why you messed that up.

Do you see where you had the preparation? Do you see where you had the illustration? So, chapter 6, verse 1. The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. Now already we say, what? Again? What is the matter with these people? How many times do they have to be chided? How many times do they have to be chastised and have the reins jerked to bring them back onto the straight path? But the land had rest for 40 years after the Deborah Barak victory. But the Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight, in the eyes of the Lord.

And what was the nature of that evil? Does it tell us what it was? We already know what it is, right? They have had this spelled out to them in the past. And a prophet is going to come down and spell it out for them here in a few verses. They did evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years.

And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Now do you think that nobody cried out to the

Lord for seven whole years and that's why it lasted seven years? Or do you think that God said the penalty for this level of apathy and disobedience and faithlessness will be seven years and cry all you want, I'm not going to listen to you for seven years. The latter is the case.

Much as it was when Israel went into captivity in the northern kingdom and when the southern kingdom went into the Babylonian captivity, God said, I'm not even talking to you for 70 years. Don't even bother crying out and asking for it to be shortened. It's not going to be shortened.

Well, this is a seven-year oppression from the Midianites. Now, who are the Midianites? What do you remember about Midian? Well, if you recall, these people are descended from Abraham through Keturah. Midian is one of those 17 princes that are cousins to the Isaac line.

The next time they show up in Scripture, you have Moses fleeing Egypt and going to the Midianites. You have Hobab or Reuel or Jethro, depending on whether his title or his name that you want to use. They are a nomadic people, but they also build cities.

But much of their population is nomadic, and they follow the flocks. Their territory is at the northern extremity of the Sinai Peninsula. If you've seen the map there, you know that that's kind of a V-shaped thing.

Well, if you drew a line across the top to make a triangle, they're kind of at that northern edge. And their range, where they take their flocks, extends much wider than the territory that they occupy and the territory where they build their cities. They are neighbors to Moab.

And you may remember also that the next time they are mentioned in Scripture is when Israel is leaving Egypt and has gone and gotten the law, and they're trying to progress toward the land of promise. In Numbers chapter 22, Israel moves and camps in the plains of Moab on the side of Jordan across from Jericho. They are where they are going to be four decades in the future.

And that's when Balak, the king of Moab, the son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people, because there were many. Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel.

So Moab said to the elders of Midian, Now this company will lick up everything around us as an ox licks up the grass of the field. I'm reading from Numbers 22. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time, so he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Baor at Pthor, which is near the river in the land of the sons of his people, to call to him, saying, Look, a people has come from Egypt.

They cover the face of the earth. They are settling next to me. Please come at once, curse this people.

They are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. I know that whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.

So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak. We don't always remember that it's the Moabites and the Midianites who decide that even with their combined forces, they are not going to be able to overpower the people of Israel, and they need some supernatural luck. They need some supernatural intervention to put a hocus-pocus on the people of Israel so that they can defeat them.

Well, you remember the story of Balaam. And as it turns out, Balaam, of course, blesses the people, and the Lord puts a word in his mouth, and he blesses them, and Balak gets upset. He blesses them again.

Balak gets upset. He blesses them a third time in chapter 24 of Numbers, and he prophesies a fourth time, and that fourth prophecy is particularly interesting. That's the one that we review at Christmastime in 24:17 of Numbers.

I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob.

A scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of Tumat, which is actually destroy all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be a possession. Seir also his enemies will be a possession, while Israel does valiantly.

Out of Jacob one shall have dominion, and destroy the remains of the city. Amalek was first among nations, but he shall be last until he perishes. He looks on the Kenites, and he curses the Kenites.

Firm is your dwelling place, and your nest is set on the rock. Nevertheless, Cain shall be burned. How long until Asher carries you away captive? And you remember we had a Kenite mentioned in the last chapter, because they haven't yet been taken captive by Asher.

That's a few years down the road. Well, the reason I'm rehearsing this at some length is this bears on the Gideon story to a significant extent. This is the history of Israel with Midian.

In chapter 25, Israel remained in the Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. And the reason they do this is upon the advice and at the behest of Balaam. What was Balaam's problem? What's the first character flaw we see in Balaam in that whole story? When the elders of Midian and the elders of Moab come and talk to him, he's all ready to go.

Why? Money, money, money, money. And God doesn't let him curse the people. He blesses the people, and there's not much they can do to stop that.

But he sticks around. And after the Balak-Balaam interaction, and he can't curse them from the top of the hill, well, he goes and says, well, there's got to be another way. And even after his supernatural experience on the road, meeting the talking donkey, meeting the angel in his donkey talks, and so forth, isn't it interesting that this does not make a sufficient impression on

Balaam to keep him focused on God and his job as a prophet of God for the remainder of his life? He eventually convinces himself that, well, God said I'm not allowed to curse the people, I can only bless them.

That's the word that he gave me. But he didn't say that I couldn't advise these people on how they can protect themselves from this huge horde. In some kind of way, Balaam rationalized in his mind that it would be okay to advise the Midianites and the Moabites on how to weaken Israel.

And he said, well, if you can corrupt their morals, if you can get your women in there and entice them and seduce them, they serve the Lord God, and the reason they're strong and the reason I couldn't curse them is because God is with them. Well, God is only with them when they're faithful and when they're obedient. When Israel is disobedient and faithless, God no longer fights for them, no longer protects and blesses them, so all I can tell you is if they're not faithful to their God, they will be much easier to defeat.

And this is the message that Balaam, the prophet of God, gave to the Moabites and the Midianites. So, in Numbers 25, Israel is there, and they began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited people to sacrifices of their gods.

The people ate and bowed down to their gods. Israel was joined to Baal the poor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel. And there is a great deal of discipline that follows.

You remember the story of Phinehas and Zimri and Cosby that get stabbed with the same javelin and so on. And God says to Moses after those two were killed and after the purge of those who had joined themselves to Baal, then the Lord spoke to Moses, this is Numbers 25, 16, Harass the Midianites and attack them, for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cosby, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor. Notice he does not say harass the Moabites.

Balak is the king of the Moabites. But Moses is commanded by God to go after the Midianites. So God tells him take a census, find all who are able to go to war in Israel, and in the plains of Moab, Moses and Eliezer the priest take this census and you have those numbers given in the remainder of chapter 26 of the book of Numbers.

And that accounting is the list that is going to be used to determine when can Israel go into the land. Because everybody on that census list will die. And you have this given at the end of Numbers 26.

These are those who were numbered by Moses and Eliezer the priest who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them, they

shall surely die in the wilderness.

There was not left a man of them except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. And so this is the next generation standing there getting ready to go into the land. Now, we've covered the rest of Numbers here when the daughters of Zelophehad and the whole, because the inheritance, this is right at the end of Moses' life.

I think I misspoke earlier when I said that they were going to have to wait four decades to go in. This is the second time they come up to the river and this is when Moses doesn't get to go in and Joshua is designated as the leader. But this was their encounter with Midian.

This is the history with Midian. And there is a further note made of the death of Balaam when they go in and take the land of Midian because Midian, their settled land, occupies where Reuben Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh are eventually going to be. They share the territory of Gilead and some of the rest of that.

And that is partly Midianite territory. So, now when we come to Judges chapter 6 and these people that were supposed to have been eliminated, they were harassed in the days of Moses, they were chased down in the days of Moses, then they were attacked again in the campaign on the east side of the Jordan, but they did not eradicate them. They did not eliminate them.

And now, many, many decades after the days of Joshua, the Midianites have reconstituted their back in the same way that we had a reoccupation of Hazor when it should have been long gone and nobody should have been coming back. Jabin should not have been setting up shop there, but they weren't eliminated. And this is a reminder that those areas of sin, those areas of failure that we do not purge out are like old leaven.

A little leaven will leaven the whole lump. And if you've got your lump of bread dough and it's unleavened, leaven being the picture of sin in the Bible, it tells us, purge out the old leaven. But if you leave a little bit, I always think of mustard.

Mustard is the hardest thing to completely get clear of and get rid of and not find on your tie or in the edge of your fingernail. Mustard just seems to not be fully eradicated, no matter what you do. You lay something down, you pick it up, and there was some kind of mustard on the table.

Mustard from lunch. I can't tell you how many ties I've looked at and all of a sudden I say, well, there's mustard on my tie. How did that get there? Well, leaven is like that.

It persists. And a little bit of it will eventually grow and restore. An entire lump of bread dough can become leavened and now you get a start all over.

A little bit of that can go and leaven an entire... They've got these loaves of bread that went for generations in Israel that all started with one original leaven culture and it just kept leavening and leavening. It's ubiquitous. So, with sin, it's just like these Canaanites.

If there's a few of them left, they will proliferate. They will come back. They left a few Midianites and now the Midianites have repopulated and the Midianites are once again a threat.

They're back to being a raiding nomadic force against Israel. And it is because of failure to obey. So it was, in verse 3 of chapter 6 of Judges, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up.

Also Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them. They would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza. Where is Gaza? Gaza is one of the cities of the Philistines.

It's often given as kind of a southern boundary of Israel. As far as Gaza means all the way to the southern edge, but it's the southwestern edge because it's over in Philistine country. Gaza, if you want a hook to hang Gaza on in your mind, Gaza is probably most famous for being the place where Samson brought the house down.

The house that Samson collapsed was in Gaza. So that helps you remember that it was a Philistine city and it's often given as... So all the way across. Remember the Midianites are on the east side of the Jordan and they're raiding across down into the land and they're raiding all the way across the land, all the way over to Philistine country.

Notice they're not raiding the Philistines, but they're raiding Israel. They're easy pickings. 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, for they would come up with their livestock and their tents coming in as numerous as locusts.

How did you get Midianites as numerous as locusts just since the time of Joshua and since the last days of Moses when they wiped them out in droves? Well, now they're back. They and their camels were without number and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

It came to pass when the children cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel. Now, when's the last time Israel got a message from God in verbal form? Did God come down and speak in the days of Deborah and Barak? Did God come down and speak in the days of Ehud? Did God come down and speak in the days of Shamgar? When's the last time God spoke? Through His angel. It's way back.

Remember the angel of the Lord back, what was it, Judges chapter 3? Maybe it was chapter 2. It's way back. They forsook the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths and so on back in chapter 2. The angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Boquim and said, and you have that message from God. We haven't had any sort of a detailed message from God since then and now we're in chapter 6 and we are many decades later.

God sends a prophet. He doesn't send an angel this time. Notice the downscaling in magnitude of God's intervention here.

The prophet 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 and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppress you and drove them out before you and gave you their land. 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.

You notice that this is something of a shorter message as well. Back in chapter 2 when the angel of the Lord came down and spoke, it's a similar theme. I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers.

I said I will never break my covenant with you. I said you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall tear down their altars, but you have not obeyed my voice.

Why have you done this? I also said I will not drive them out before you. There will be thorns in your side. Their gods will be a snare to you.

So it was when the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, the people lifted up their voice and wept. They called the name of that place Bochim, which is literally weeping. And they sacrificed there to the Lord.

Now we have a similar message. You have not obeyed my voice. So who does this prophet speak to? To whom does he speak? The children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites.

The Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel and he says this message. It might have been an itinerant prophet. He may have wandered through from village to village and tribal area to tribal area passing this message along.

He may have delivered it at a meeting of the elders who have assembled together to cry out to the Lord. Maybe they hunted up a Levite to try to see if they could get God's attention. But this has been brewing and stewing for seven years.

I'm sure they started crying out to the Lord very soon after the Midianites came through by families and by clans and by tribes. And eventually the whole land is being persecuted. And so they have united in a cry to the Lord.

And the Lord has responded to the entire nation with a prophet who speaks this message to the nation. You have not obeyed my voice. Notice the bulk of the message is on who God is, not a laundry list of their transgressions.

They know what they've done. They should know. Then suddenly we have a shift.

And from this sort of generalized picture in verse 11, we get to a very specific location, very specific place and time. 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. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor.

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. Then notice verse 14, 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? Well, there is an extended dialogue that we'll study, but this gives us our scene and our backdrop.

There are a few things that we've mentioned in passing in other studies that you probably notice here. First of all, the angel of the Lord does not go to an elder in Israel, does not go to a Levite, does not go to the high priest. Who is the spiritual leadership in Israel? Why is this scene not at the house of the high priest? Why is it not while somebody was serving at the Ark of the Covenant? What's the problem here? What does this tell us that the angel of the Lord goes and appears to some guy that's threshing wheat? There is nobody qualified.

No one is doing their job as a Levite. You can go back to Numbers and see how many Levites there were when they entered the land, and they've only gotten more numerous. And out of that entire tribe, nobody is doing his job.

There is no Levite who can step up, just like there wasn't in Deborah's day, just like there hasn't been ever since they came into the land. The Levites have just been invisible. Where have the Levites done anything? Is there any organized sacrifice, organized worship? Are the feasts being observed? Where is the Ark? Where is the tabernacle? Where are the accoutrements that God commanded and laid down the law for at Mount Sinai? It's invisible.

There is a vacuum of leadership that begins with the Levites and then moves to the elders of Israel, those princes and those kings that were addressed by Deborah. They got the message for a while. The land had 40 years of rest, but that generation cycled, and a new generation came up, and they've forgotten the lessons of history and have repeated the mistakes of the past.

You can tell I've been listening to one too many campaign speeches. And so now there is a vacuum. There is no spiritual leadership.

There is no elder leadership. And we are down to the son of a guy who is doing manual labor. Sort of reminds you of where God had to go to find a king in Israel.

He had to go to the sheepfolds. He had to go to the guy that was doing a servant's job. Here is the son of a relatively wealthy man threshing alone, because everybody has become impoverished.

Everyone has gotten into dire straits. Now, what did the first several verses of this chapter tell us? People cried out to the Lord. The Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel.

What did the prophet say? You have not obeyed my voice. I am the God that brought you out of Israel. I am the God that made you these promises.

I delivered you out of the hand of all who oppressed you. I drove them out before you. I gave you their land.

I said, I am the Lord your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites. You have not obeyed my voice.

When the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon, what is his first question? His first question is one that has just been answered. O my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor. Well, if the Lord is with us, why are we in such miserable circumstances? Why are we in such dire straits? This is a picture, it's a snapshot of what we discussed at the very beginning of this lesson.

You can miss, you can be blind, you can think that you are thinking reasonably and logically, you can think that you've got valid questions, that you've got valid concerns, and that you've got a grip on the issues, and you seem to think that, well, we're in these dire straits. God said he was going to be with us. Why is all this stuff happening to us? Where is God? Where is God? What happened to the fulfillment of his promises? You say, God is with me.

Look at my situation. I'm here trying to thresh wheat in a wine press, and I'm getting wheat chucks and chaff and stuff down my neck, and this is just a miserable, dismal situation. Where is God? Why has God let this happen? Why has God let this happen to me? God has just dispatched a prophet through the entire land, telling everybody in Israel exactly what the situation is.

And Gideon didn't register it. Why is he asking this question? God already sent a guy with the answer all over the place. You have not obeyed my voice, God says.

This is like an episode of Jeopardy. You have not obeyed my voice, and the question is, why has all this happened? The answer for 50 is, why then has all this happened to us? It's backwards. Where are God's miracles, which our fathers told us about, saying, did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? Who just got through talking about the one who brought them up from Egypt, and what his promises would be? I mean, this is a question that is very ill-timed.

Now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. So God says through his angel, well, Gideon, let me explain again. Yes, I am the God that brought you up, but since then, this is what you have done.

But does the angel of the Lord even condescend to answer this inane question? He doesn't. He ignores it. He brushes it aside.

This is what Jesus used to do a lot in his earthly ministry. People would ask one question and try to raise some issue, and Jesus would just start talking about a completely different thing.

Because if you've been paying attention, you already know the answer.

That's why he didn't explain a lot of his parables. If you knew what you're supposed to know, you wouldn't need the parable explained. And then he feels sorry for his disciples, and he explains to them sometimes.

But the Lord turned to him and said, Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hands of the Midianites. Have I not sent you? So God says, Go, and then he says, Have I not sent you? I mean, they're practically the same sentence. Go now and deliver the people.

Hey, I've sent you. In the previous sentence, I sent you, so I have sent you. It's really emphatic in Hebrew.

So this tells us that we may not be able to expect really great things out of Gideon, because he is not a giant of faith and perspicacity. The prophet has distributed a word from the Lord that completely rolled off Gideon's mind like water off a duck's back. And he is just as confused about why Israel is in dire straits as before the prophet came.

No attention paid to the Word of God. This is the point. You and I should not have an enfeebled moral sense.

We should not have a screwy compass in our soul. We should be able to discern. We should be able to answer many of our own questions if we pay attention to what the Word of God tells us.

If we find ourselves confused, if we find ourselves baffled, if we find ourselves asking a lot of questions, and particularly if we start asking ourselves, Why has God let this happen? Why has God... You can be certain that if you are asking the question, Why has God... You have not been listening to the Word of God, because the answer is given ahead of time. God does not do things in a vacuum. Remember when he came down and walked with Abraham and said, Shall I hide from Abraham the thing I am about to do? Abraham was a friend of God.

Abraham walked with God. Abraham trusted God in the face of blindingly impossible circumstances and situations. Abraham just trusted.

And God came down in person and walked with Abraham and explained to him what was going to happen in Sodom and Gomorrah and those cities. God said, I will not hide from Abraham what I am about to do. God does not hide from us what he is doing.

If it is hidden, it is because our minds have been blinded. Because we have not been listening. You and I, especially, as students of the Word of God, should not be baffled.

We should not be nonplussed. We should not be in the dark. God has spoken.

And if we still have questions, we need to go back and review what God has said, rather than looking to heaven and saying, God, where is the answer? What is the problem? God has spoken. It is up to us to pay attention. And we will know the answer.

We will not have to ask silly questions. We can, hopefully, dream up much more intelligent and insightful and searching questions for God. Well, let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we will see the further instructions that the angel is going to give to Gideon and what that portends.