

A MAN CALLED GIDEON

Judges 6 - 8

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INTRODUCTION

Gideon was overwhelmed that the Angel of the Lord would appear to him and appoint him as the man whom the Lord would use to deliver Israel from the bitter oppression of the Midianites, after seven years of intense subjugation. There was a time when Gideon would understand that he was surrounded by the Spirit of the Lord. The times in which we live are far different from the times in which Gideon lived. Let me share a story I heard when I was in seminary decades ago.

My father and a number of relatives were drafted during World War II, and from time to time one might tell about something that happened during the war. I never heard one man boast of his courage, fighting skills, or anything like that. Later, when I was at Mississippi College and then at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I had friends who had served our country during that war. They were probably from 35 - 40 years old, and they had some very distinct memories of the war. Jesse told a few of us in my room about the time when he, an eighteen year old private, was told by his sergeant to go along a street in some German town and look around the corner to see if there might be any German troops on the street, but hidden from them by a brick building built along side the sidewalk.

Jesse said he moved slowly, carefully down the sidewalk, along side the building. He told us that the closer he got to the corner the more certain he was that he would see German soldiers around the corner. So, as he approached the corner he eased down to the sidewalk and crawled to the corner of the building, absolutely convinced that when he looked around the corner he would see the enemy. As he approached the corner, he decided to lie flat on the sidewalk and peep around the corner, quietly but quickly. Jesse took off his helmet and held both his carbine and his helmet in his left hand as he paused, and then stuck his head forward enough to get his eyes around the corner. He did and almost butted heads with a young German soldier who was doing exactly what he was doing around the corner. They both jumped up and ran as fast as they could.

Hollis has a different story. He came very close to death three times (possibly four times). He was trying to walk through some deep mud when he heard a mortar round coming

his way. He knew it would fall just to his right side, and since he could not run he threw himself to the left. The mortar round hit the ground about three feet to his right, and IT WAS A DUD! From what we were told, it was extremely rare for a mortar round to be a dud. Before he could move any farther along he heard a second round coming his way, and once again, he threw himself to the left. That mortar round landed about four feet from his right leg. It was also a dud!

Another time, Hollis was walking with his fellow soldiers across some valley when the Germans opened up on them with machine guns. Within a very brief period of time smoke filled the valley and they couldn't see anything. He dropped to the ground and found that he could see beneath the smoke, from about eighteen inches on down to the ground. He, as I recall, may have been the only one to escape that ambush. On another occasion, he and other soldiers were slipping alongside some kind of levy when the Germans opened fire on them. Hollis dived over the levy and was the only one who escaped the enemy fire.

Hollis, unlike Gideon, knew the Lord was saving his life, and when it happened three (or four) times he began to understand that the Lord was saving him for some reason. He discovered that purpose when he sensed that the Lord was calling him into the ministry. Several years after seminary I was surprised when my younger brother and sister began talking about Bro. Hollis (then used his last name). I discovered that my home association had called him as their Director of Missions. Later, he moved to Alaska to do mission work, and from there he moved back to a state convention and served as their director of missions.

What made Hollis' experience different from that of Gideon? In the first place, Jesus had come and died on the cross for our sins. In the second place the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to fill the hearts and lives of born again Christians who will permit Him to bless them, guide them, comfort them, and empower them. He had a distinct advantage over Gideon. For one thing, he trusted the Lord and yielded to the Holy Spirit. Gideon was overwhelmed by the visit of the Angel of the Lord, and he was surrounded by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Holman Bible Dictionary offers this brief introduction to the man upon we focus our attention at this time:

"Personal name meaning, "one who cuts to pieces." The fifth major judge of twelfth century Israel. He was also called Jerubbaal and was the son of Joash of the tribe of Manasseh. He judged for forty years (Judg. 6:11-8:35). . –Holman Bible Dictionary

That which may stand out in this brief note from the Holman Bible Dictionary (HBD after this) is that Gideon was the fifth major judge "of the twelfth century Israel." Why should that note claim our attention at this point? For one thing, if Gideon was the "fifth major

judge of twelfth century Israel”, there were four major Judges before this time that the Lord called him to deliver Israel from a pagan and more powerful army than Israel could muster. Of course, Deborah is probably the best known. But the point is this: Israel had rebelled against the Lord and thus begun a cycle we must not miss in any study of the Book of Judges. The Scripture informs us that: “The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord handed them over to Midian seven years...(Judges 6:1 (HCSB).

Wait a minute! Does this say that “the Lord handed them (His Chosen People) over to Midian for seven years”? It certainly does! Then, where does that leave us today? If you followed the Republican and Democrat Conventions (2016) you may be, and some are, convinced that the other side is corrupt and evil. Will the Lord hold America accountable for the moral decline in this country since WW2? What do you think? Are we not paying a price for our rebellion against the Lord? You want to know when we took a major step backward toward the world. Just recall - if you remember the time when they passed repealed the Blue Laws. Big companies wanted their businesses open on Sunday for the profit. But it goes beyond that. My older son John, while a student could not get work on the campus at Mississippi College. Why? He had worked while in high school and bought two or three CDs - which disqualified him from working - on a Christian campus. The federal loans and jobs were for people who had played and made no effort to save their money. The lazier the kid was the better his chances of getting loans - or better yet, just being lazy and doing very little that resembled work. So, he got a job in a local Mall, and when the repealed the Blue Laws, he went to the owners of the business and asked to be off on Sunday because he went home and attended worship services at his home church. They told him he would take his turn just like everyone else. He resigned on the spot. He was being penalized for his commitment to the Lord and to His church.

Today, businesses are open all over the country on the Lord’s Day. Some people have to work on Sunday: doctors, nurses, aids in hospitals, and in other businesses upon which the public must depend. There are businesses like a paper mill which take about two days to shut it down and another two to three days to start everything up again. Police and others must work to protect the citizens, but many of the places are open for profit, and after a few generations America has reached the point that if people church members attend a service on Sunday morning they should be free to go to go out to eat, then visit the Mall, or go to see a movie. During that time Sunday evening worship services have felt the impact. No longer do children and young people come to Church Training - what is Church Training (or Training Union) where they learn a lot about how the church functions, or church doctrines? Many churches have discontinued evening services. In other words, America has turned its back on the church for profit, entertainment, or to “rest” at home. After all, golf or fishing can take a lot out of a person.

I have lived through this period and I am concerned that certain things that are happening in America may well spell the end of the America of our forefathers. How

long will God tolerate it when His Holy Day is dishonored? Or, when His Holy Name is violated? Some people who faithfully attend their Sunday School class and the Morning Worship Services see no contradiction in giving the rest of the day to the world, or even to the devil.

But, for now, let's focus on ancient Israel. Ancient Israel, that is. How can a God of love and mercy use a pagan nation to inflict such suffering and sorrow to His Chosen People? He is sovereign, meaning that He has both the power and right to discipline a rebellious people, be they a pagan nation or a nation that professes a faith in the Him, but does not serve Him or honor Him consistently or reverently. He can bless or He can curse. He had special plans for His people, but they did not follow Him or honor Him. He blessed His people beyond measure when they obeyed Him, but when they rebelled against Him, He dealt with them according to their sin, and His love for them. A parent is often forced to discipline a child and when he or she does it they should do it because of their love for the child. Our Lord's judgment may be gentle or it may be severe, depending on the behavior of His people. He had the power to withhold rain from their crops, or the right and power to send the ungodly Midianites or the Amalekites against them and when that happened the punishment would be severe, as we shall see.

Just think about it: the Lord had (1) called Abraham to leave his home and prosperous life in Ur of the Chaldees and travel to, and live in a distant land. This was around 2000 B.C. The Lord promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation - but before that happened, his descendants would live in a foreign land for 400 years, after which the Lord would bring them back to the Promised Land. (2) Abraham's son Jacob (Israel) would see his beloved son Joseph disappear from the scene. His brothers had planned to kill him Joseph, but Reuben stopped them. So they sold him into slavery, and that caravan that purchased him sold him to a man named Potiphar in Egypt. (3) The Lord blessed Joseph with some of the most amazing wisdom we see in the ancient world. He would prophesy that a famine would hit the land of Egypt in seven years (seven years of abundant harvests and then seven years of intense famine. The Lord saw to it that, in spite charges against him, and in spite of his imprisonment, Joseph would rise to the position of the second most powerful man in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh. Joseph was not only the second most powerful man in Egypt, he was probably the second most powerful man in that part of the world. He may well have been the godliest man of his day.

Joseph settled his kinsmen in the fertile land of Goshen, where they prospered for four hundred years, after which a new Pharaoh would launch an intense form of slavery in order to severely reduce the number of Israelites. They were two million strong, a fact which Pharaoh saw as a threat to Egypt. In time, the Lord moved to deliver His people from a vile form of slavery. He announced His plans to Moses, and He announced His most holy name, YAHWEH, to Moses. The name means, "I am that I am." A brilliant Hebrew scholar, the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, assured me that it means more than that:

“It means ‘I exist of My Self,’ but it also means, ‘I am the source of all that exists, and the source of your existence.” He was the source of Moses’ life, and He is the source of each individual’s life today. Every human being receives His life from the Lord, and every single human being will give an account one day as he stands before the judgement bar of God.

Yahweh sent Moses to deliver His children Israel from bondage in Egypt and miraculously brought them across the Red Sea on dry ground, and then destroyed the Egyptian army which pursued them. Then they traveled on to Mt. Sinai - in Arabia: (“Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children” (Gal 4:25, bold added by this writer). This does not fit the mount called Sinai on the peninsula called Sinai. Explorers Bob Kornuke and Larry Williams, and an American family (the Petersons) whose father worked in Saudi Arabia had to take off a certain number of days each year, visited this site many times over a period of years. Their pictures and their testimony support the claims of Kornuke and Williams, and both are supported by what Paul wrote to the Galatians.

The entire Exodus experience was one of God’s blessings, and for the Israelites, doubts, fear, rebellion, and the horrible sin of idolatry, which involved the entire nation of people who were supposed to be waiting for Moses to return from Mount Sinai where he had gone to meet with YAHWEH. He turned with two stones upon which were carved The Ten Commandments, by which they should live, both in the wilderness and in the Land Flowing with Milk and Honey, the land the Lord had promised to Abraham some 440 years or earlier. Those Ten Commandments also apply to all people today.

Now, I have a personal confession - I want to confess an obsession:

I have a confession and I might as well confess it here and now: I am a Louis L’Amour fan, and have been almost all of my adult life. I have read and reread almost everything he had published in his long and very productive life as a writer, but the thing that amazes me is that this man who had very little formal education, was driven by an unquenchable desire for information, for knowledge. I have read all of my adult life. I had to do a lot of reading for my training at Mississippi College, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and then at Luther Rice Seminary. During one year at New Orleans Seminary I had to write 36 brief, but formal papers. That was a challenge. I spent a lot of time trying to learn to write in a popular style at Luther Rice. That was also a challenge because I was trained to follow the formal writing style of those formal papers. At LRS, we were told that we must write a lengthy dissertation in a popular style. In other words, we must write for publication, or at the very least, write something a publisher might decide to publish because of public interest in the subject, but at the same time write in a popular style, using words, sentences, and arguments the average person might follow.

Documentation, or lack of same, was a challenge all the way through that project. This was not an academic project, but a "book written in a popular style." It was a challenge to write in a "popular" style instead of the "formal" style required by the New Orleans Seminary. I submitted it, and only later discovered that someone had assigned my project to two different faculty committees. When I got my copy back from each faculty group I was surprised to find that both committees said practically the same thing about my project. They were positive and encouraging. The point being that we were to write for publication. Years later, I showed one of my copies to Dr. Earl Guinn, former president of Louisiana Baptist College, and currently serving as a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the oldest of the Southern Baptist Seminaries. They had only recently begun to offer a Doctor of Ministry degree similar to that created by Luther Rice. Dr. Guinn looked through my "book" and finally said, "This is what we are trying to get our students to do." That was high praise coming from someone known for taking a theological position well to the left of mine.

I have talked with others who love reading Louis L'Amour and heard some interesting comments." Attorney David Hammett said, "The Last of the Breed' is the best book I have ever read." I could certainly understand his thinking. My son, not only an attorney, but a close friend to David Hammett, gave me a book for Father's Day, 1990, entitled EDUCATION OF A WANDERING MAN. That book will "blow your mind!" Under the most trying of circumstances (nearly starving in the desert, working in mines, on merchant vessels, stranded in foreign ports, and fighting through World War II, the man never stopped reading. He had a personal library of 17,000 books in his home. I spoke with people in New Mexico about his writing and was told by various people that the amazing thing about his writing was the accuracy with which he wrote about even the most remote places. He had visited some spot in the desert, he could remember the details 30 years later, just like he was standing there again.

You may be wondering why I left writing about Gideon and began writing about Louis L'Amour. Sadly, as I read his book, EDUCATION OF A WANDERING MAN, I moved from being extremely impressed, to realizing that in all his reading, he was missing the great truth of God's Word. When he wrote about a Catholic priest he called him "Father," but when he wrote about a minister of the Gospel, be they Protestant, or Baptist, he called that minister a "sky pilot." Baptists were never Protestants - they were often the target of both Catholics and Protestants - but that was a long time back.

As I read Louis L'Amour's book about his life time of reading everything from western novels to the most sophisticated and very deep books by both ancient and modern writers. I could not help but wonder what impact it would have had on Louis L'Amour if he had actually read Genesis. If so, he would understand something about Creation and the early life of humans on this earth. Had he studied the Pentateuch as he had read about Socrates and Shakespeare, would it not have had a greater impact on his life? And I am not talking about His love for poetry and history, I am talking about that which will

shape one's life for the glory of Yahweh, the great I AM. My wife Rebecca has read the Bible through every year for over 30 years. My good friend, J. D. Sagely and his wife Judy, have read the Bible through some 40 times. I have never read the Bible through as have my wife and friends, but if you thumb through any one of several Bibles you will see highlighted passages, underlined sentences, and notes all in the margins or at the top or bottom of the page. If you will spend enough time in the Word of God it will impact your life for the glory of the Lord.

In his book, *The Lonesome Gods*, L'Amour made the statement, "People were killing each other for a million years before the gun was invented." For a story teller who wrote of so many books, on so many subjects - history, poetry, warfare, he never comprehended the Person, work, and presence of the Lord. He knew about almost everything we can imagine - from the frozen north to the intense heat of the desert, be they Mexico, Arizona, or Africa. In one book he agrees with a Native American, and adds that all religions are basically the same.

I have a long list of Sermons, Commentaries, and Articles posted on www.PastorLife.Com, a creation of Founder and Editor Dr. J. Mike Minnix. Much of what I have written over the past decades were written in the middle of the night - no phone calls and no one stopping to ask, "What are you doing?" It is interesting for me to recall how I would find myself awake at 2:00 A. M. and know that if I didn't get my thoughts written down I would not remember them the next day. I would urge everyone to (1) read the Word of God, (2) study the Word of God, and (3) apply the Word of God in everyday life. Now, let me get back to the Judges, to Gideon, and to God's provisions and His protection.

Here is the most baffling thing about the Lord's experience with His Chosen People: Even after He miraculously delivered them from a cruel form of slavery in Egypt, they rebelled against him time after time. They blamed Moses for everything that did not go their way and turned time after time to the pagan gods of the Egyptians, rejecting Yahweh, the unseen God who had delivered them and provided for them.

They saw His hand everywhere they turned, but responded by complaining against Moses and Yahweh. The ancestors of these people had seen the ten plagues Yahweh sent against Egypt in order to convince Pharaoh to let His people go, as He had sent word by Moses that this was a part of His plan for Israel. They walked across the Red Sea on dry ground, they drank the bitter water made sweet by the Lord, they were given the food of the wilderness to eat, and they were given water (from a rock in the desert) sufficient to satisfy 2 million people plus their livestock for an extended period of time at Mount Sinai.

When Moses was delayed in returning from the top of Mt. Sinai, the people rebelled against the Lord Who had miraculously delivered them from the cruel slavery in Egypt. Moses threw down the two pieces of stone on which the Ten Commandments were

engraved when he saw the sad (and disgusting) sin of the entire nation, including Aaron, his brother, who was set aside by Yahweh to be their first high priest. They had seen the fire on the mountain when Yahweh came down to meet Moses on top of Mt. Sinai. These very people were being sustained by water Yahweh had provided for them. They survived on food He had given them, yet they were acting like pagans.

Because of their fear after twelve spies returned from the Land of Promised and only two (Joshua and Caleb) of the twelve said they could conquer the land. Because of their rebellion, Yahweh determined that they would remain in the wilderness, living off the manna He provided and the water He made available to them. All those twenty years of age and over died in the wilderness because of their rebellion.

At around 1400 B.C., the Lord instructed Joshua to lead the Children of Israel (Jacob) into the Promised Land. The conquest was miraculous from beginning to end. That is, except for the fact that some of the people did not drive the pagan, idolatrous inhabitants out of the land. Many of the Israelite men were attracted to Baal worship, no doubt because of the prostitution that was a part of Baal worship. The people continuously rebelled against the Lord and He punished them repeatedly, but the next generation would return to that hideous form of idolatry, in open violation of the Ten Commandments, especially the one that prohibited the worship of idols or any false gods.

Israel, in spite of the full knowledge of God's miraculous deliverance of His people from Egypt, across the Red Sea, on to Sinai, and then for another 40 years in the wilderness, continually rebelled against the Lord. He used Joshua to lead in the Conquest of Canaan (see *A Man Called Joshua* in this series which is posted on PastorLife.Com under Commentaries).

Still, the people rebelled against the Lord, including turning to gods who were not gods, but idols, which worship was detestable to the one true God. Even after He gave them the land, they continued to rebel against Him. He had sent judges before Gideon, including Deborah, to deliver His chosen people from the hands of evil, idolatrous nations in the region.

Now, let us look at what had happened after the Conquest of Israel. It is a sad history and the cycle was repeated over and over. We find one example in Judges 6:1-11:

(1) The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord handed them over to Midian seven years, (2) and they oppressed Israel. Because of Midian, the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. (3) Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and the eastern peoples came and attacked them. (4) They encamped against them and destroyed the produce of the land, even as far as Gaza. They left nothing for Israel to eat, as well as no sheep, ox or donkey. (5) For the Midianites came with their cattle and their tents like a

great swarm of locusts. They and their camels were without number, and they entered the land to waste it. (6) So Israel became poverty-stricken because of Midian, and the Israelites cried out to the Lord. (7) When the Israelites cried out to Him because of Midian, (8) the Lord sent a prophet to them. He said to them, "This is what the Lord God of Israel says: 'I brought you out of Egypt and out of the place of slavery. (9) I delivered you from the power of Egypt and the power of all who oppressed you. I drove them out before you and gave you their land. (10) I said to you: I am the Lord your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites whose land you live in. But you did not obey Me.'" (Judges 6:1-10, HCSB, bold added by this writer)

We will see this cycle repeated over and over, not only through the Period of the Judges, but also during the period of the kings. It goes like this:

1. The Lord provided for His people.
2. They rebelled against Him.
3. He sent an evil power to judge them.
4. They repented and cried out to the Lord.
5. He sent someone to deliver them.

They lived in peace as long as that judge lived. When that judge died they turned to evil, which often began when the men of Israel went to visit the prostitutes among the Baal worshipers. Baal was a fertility cult.

We need to pay attention to some very interesting and informative things about Yahweh's dealings with a rebellious people. But what I keep asking myself at this point is: WHY WOULD GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE CONTINUE TO REBEL AGAINST HIM AND BRING ON HIS JUDGMENT? While thinking about that, see if you can understand why, when, and how America has changed its course over the past six or seven decades. There was a time when I would have suggested to almost anyone that we watch the History Channel. A few weeks ago, someone announced a new program schedule for showing on the History Channel: a history of George Washington. The announcer assured us that George Washington was not the honest man history books have claimed. He also stated that George Washington was not the general that we have been told through history and other books. That announcement reminded me of a class I took in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary on The Christian Answer to Communism. Our text book, by R. N. Carew Hunt, provided us with the title for the course. We read about Historical Determinism, so commonly applied in the Soviet Union under the influence (and power) of Lenin, Stalin, and other leading Communists of their history.

Historical Determinism allows one to rewrite history that does not produce the results they desire. Why would the History Channel try to persuade us to turn away from our history and from the foundation of our history and replace it with a history that denies God's role in the founding, development, and the great success of our system of

government, by the grace of God, unless they are enemies of God and the nation established by our Founding Fathers? I am not at all happy with the answers I get to that question. In the community where I grew up, God was praised for delivering us from the brutal attack by Japanese war planes on Pearl Harbor, and the vicious attempt by Hitler to take over the world for his ungodly ideology, to expand his power, and conquer more and more countries. Many of those who fought and won the Second World War came home with a strange mind-set. It was as though some were thinking about their own sacrifices through the Great Depression and World War 2, and they were determined that their children would never have to go through that which had so dramatically impacted their generation. Some seemed determined that their young people would never have to work as hard as they, or make the sacrifices their parents had made during the Depression.

In time we would hear references to "the greatest generation" - which sounded good, and still does. And then we look at what happened to the next generation, the children of the greatest generation, and what happened to America when a generation of Americans forgot the Lord and His church in pursuit of that which brought wealth and excitement. The expression of that attitude slipped up on us while many were fighting a war in Korea or Viet Nam. Somewhere along the way, Americans became more prosperous and more self-centered and less committed to the Lord. Along the way, churches began serving up a lighter program, backing away from sound doctrine and opening the door to more fun and pleasure for young people. We began seeing fewer and fewer in church on Sunday evenings.

I was a Youth Pastor the last summer of seminary, and returned the following summer and stayed for a few more months. I had worked for several summers for the ASCS (USDA), and frankly, when I was meeting with the Youth Committee I was sort of hoping they would decide not to ask me to serve in that capacity that summer. I had made as much in one week the previous summer as they would pay me in a month - and I had used that to pay my school expenses the following year. One summer I served as a mission pastor of a mission church in the Mississippi Delta. During my years with the ASCS I learned a lot about working with a wide range of people, wealthy people, poor people, and those in between. Some young men were not able to adjust too well to working with the poor, and others had to learn how to work with the wealthy - the big farmers. Some of those big farmers were very easy to work with, while others treated the people on their farms like peasants, and would try to bully the young men sent out to "measure their cotton land" the same way, if that person would permit it. My background in church had helped me to work with all kind of people.

When I was meeting with Youth Committee, there was the desire to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, while there was an awareness of the fact that I had no living expenses when I lived at home, but would have to use a percentage of salary for that purpose if I was called to work with these young people.

The members of the Youth Committee began telling me about all the things "Jimmy" had done with the young people the previous summers. They had trips, parties, and more trips and more parties! Finally, I said, "I love young people, but the Lord didn't call me to play games." The pastor, Dr. H. R. Herrington, said, "I think we have played long enough." That sealed it! When I showed up and moved into the Bond House, I met with the pastor and he told me that I would be the Vacation Bible School Director the following week and then on the following Sunday baptize two people. I baptized twelve. Ten young people and children made professions of faith during VBS! If they had called an experienced Youth Pastor, just think how many they may have reached (or, how much more fun they would have had).

After meeting with young people I came up with something for the young people to do rather than taking another trip. We would do a survey of the town of Rayville, La. I went to the ASCS office and asked for an aerial photograph of the town of Rayville and they gave me one. I had worked with aerial photographs of farms for several years and knew I could pick out the streets of town. We did a survey of the town and prepared a list of prospects for the church. One day, I visited with some young people in an effort to get them involved in a local outreach ministry. As I was leaving one home the father, a successful farmer, said, "You preachers have got your work cut out for you now - Bonanza is coming on in color."

A mother in that same church told me that her little boy, who was around five years old at the time, was in a preschool Sunday School class when the teacher asked, "Why do we come to church?" Then, she answered her own question: "It is because we love Jesus." One little boy asked, "Mrs. Jones, don't you love Jesus on Sunday night?" Mrs. Jones (not her real name) is the one who told the little boy's mother what he had asked, but she did not say how she answered him.

We could go on and on with illustrations about what has happened in our society that has had a negative impact on church attendance. I remember when the head of the Little League baseball program in north Louisiana who stressed that the teams would have no ball games on Sunday or Wednesday nights. He announced that all-star games played in other parts of the state would be played on Sunday. At present, Travel Ball has pulled a lot of boys, and their families, out of church for months at a time. For some, a good movie is enough to keep them out of church on Sunday evening. We have seen a lot of changes in America, but when children and young people grow up under such conditions they do not seem to think there is anything wrong with it. Many people take week-end trips today. Church is where you go when you don't have anything better to do! Many adults who grew up in church, with parents who faithfully attended Sunday School, Morning Worship, and Evening Worship, seem to think very little about missing services for anything that seems interesting or exciting to them.

I was pastor of my first church out of seminary when our deacon chairman and I stopped by a supermarket in Greenville, Mississippi. As we left the store we spoke to a young man who said something about a war in Viet Nam. We had no idea of what he was saying. Mr. Oglesby asked what he meant and the young man told us about being shot down over North Viet Nam. His parachute was caught in a tree and the Viet Cong came looking for those who had bailed out of the plane. He said that he was caught in a tree and when he heard some of the Viet Cong coming his way he froze and waited for them to pass under him, and then he climbed down from the tree and made his escape. I asked how close the enemy was and he said, "If I had reached down my leg I could have kicked one's helmet off? That was my introduction to the war in Viet Nam.

The Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and in China were financing a war that would enable North Viet Nam to take over the entire region. Had they succeeded, they would have continued to their efforts to claim the rest of that part of the world. The constant warfare in the Middle East of Gideon's day was driven by the desire of the Midianites, Amalekites, and others to conquer the entire region. After all, had Israel not taken that part of the world from the Canaanite people? Now, we will look again at one of the key periods of Old Testament history.

THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

Any student of the period of the Judges will appreciate the CYCLE we shall see in studying the various judges of Israel. As previously noted, here is the way the cycle ran:

1. Turning from God (after witnessing the hand of God on Israel).
2. Judgment of God (conquered by a pagan nation).
3. Turning to God (genuine repentance and pleading for God's deliverance).
4. God sent a judge to deliver them.
5. They lived in peace as long as that Judge lived.

Then the cycle would begin all over again. They went through this cycle around 10 - 12 times before the end of the Period of the Judges. Then, they did the same thing during the time of the kings. The question is, How could they turn from the God Who had saved and blessed them? In our study today we will see that the Midianites controlled and oppressed these people to the extreme for seven years before Yahweh called a man named Gideon to overthrow them and lead the Israelites to victory over their oppressors (see Judges 6:11ff).

Most students of the Word of God are familiar with the way Gideon asked the Lord to confirm his call. Boys and girls in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School have heard or read the story of Gideon's request for a sign that the Lord really was calling him to deliver His people from their severe oppression by the Midianites. I asked my wife, Rebecca, about what age children can begin to comprehend such stories as this one. She

taught for many years with teachers who were members of our church at the time, and she and Mrs. Sylvia Hammett taught younger children stories like this one to children in the first, second and third grades. You simply have to teach the great stories of the Bible in a way that focuses on the age group you are teaching. You do not teach high school subjects to first or second graders.

GIDEON WAS CALLED TO BE A JUDGE

Here is the Scriptural account of the call of Gideon and his response to it:

(11) The Angel of the Lord came, and He sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the wine vat in order to hide it from the Midianites. (12) Then the Angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

(13) Gideon said to Him, "Please Sir, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, 'Hasn't the Lord brought us out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian."

(14) The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the power of Midian. Am I not sending you?" (15) He said to Him, "Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."

(16) "But I will be with you," the Lord said to him. "You will strike Midian down [as if it were] one man" (Judges 6:11-16, bold added by this writer).

Now, Gideon asks the Lord for some sign that He really was going to use Gideon to deliver His people Israel from the intense oppression forced on them by the Midianites. Gideon was obviously overwhelmed by this call and asked for two signs to confirm it.

(17) Then he said to Him, "If I have found favor in Your sight, give me a sign that You are speaking with me. (18) Please do not leave this place until I return to You. Let me bring my gift and set it before You." And He said, "I will stay until you return."

(19) So Gideon went and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from a half bushel of flour. He placed the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot. He brought them out and offered them to Him under the oak.

(20) The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat with the unleavened bread, put it on this stone, and pour the broth [on it] ." And he did so.

(21) The Angel of the Lord extended the tip of the staff that was in His hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire came up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the Angel of the Lord vanished from his sight.

(22) When Gideon realized that He was the Angel of the Lord, he said, "Oh no, Lord God! I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face!"

(23) But the Lord said to him, "Peace to you. Don't be afraid, for you will not die." (24) So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it Yahweh Shalom. It is in Ophrah of the Abiezrites until today." (Judges 6:11-24, HCSB, bold added by this writer)

When reading the Old Testament, make a mental note of the many times the writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit notes that the Lord has left them with a sign of His presence and His commitment to His Word. This is another account of God's call of a judge, and that judge's doubt that the Lord would call him for such an incredible task. We have read the story of how Gideon could hardly believe the Lord would call him to lead in a revolt against a nation that greatly outnumbered his and had severely oppressed his nation for seven years. The Israelites lived in, or hid in caves to hide from the Midianites, who would come through and the area and take, by force, grain, livestock, and anything else of value and leave the Israelites in extreme misery.

Before going forward with the account of Gideon's call by Yahweh to deliver His people from the pagan Midianites, some may want to identify The Angel of the Lord. Is this, as some think, a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ? There were times when an angel would appear before a follower of the Lord and it seems obvious that the Scripture is referring to an ordinary angel (if there is such thing as an ordinary angel!). This writer believes strongly in the Trinity. One of his former seminary professors stated in class that he did not believe in a real devil (Satan). Satan was simply "the personification of evil." This was in, an Intensive in the Revelation! Think about that! This same professor, I was told, spoke to a pastor's conference and stated that he wished people would stop talking about the Trinity: "The word Trinity does not appear in the Bible."

That professor had spent one school year in England where he sat under a Bible professor whose commentaries were required for some classes! That man, whose name is well known in Christian education, declared that Jesus did not walk "on" the water, He walked "toward" the water. It is all in the prepositions! Jesus and His disciples, living around the Sea of Galilee, would have walked to or from the water regularly. That was so common in that area that one would hardly mention it. Such was the interpretation of the miraculous by the professor in England, who wrote a popular series of commentaries.

I would like to ask that professors some practical questions - if he were around today. For example, I am sitting in my desk chair, typing on a key board and watching words appear (rather slowly, I might add) on the monitor in front of me. To my right is an Epson Printer

that will print in color, and on my left is a Brother Printer that prints in black and white. I would like to ask that professor if he had ever read about a computer, key board, monitor, or printer in the Bible. Maybe they really don't exist.

Now, back to Gideon. Let me ask you this: How could a Christian America become what it is today? Let me also state that I know many today reject the claim that America is, or ever was, a Christian nation. I prefer to agree with the late Francis Schaeffer, who said that America had a Christian consensus. When I was growing up in the Mississippi Delta we began each day with a Bible reading and prayer in the class room. My younger brother Mike told me that he went to a bigger school and there they had someone read a passage of Scripture over the inter-com and then have a word of prayer. Mike said that no one was paying any attention. When a classmate stood in front of our class and read a passage from the Bible, they had our attention. That person might pray or lead us in repeating the Model Prayer (usually called the Lord's Prayer). If you really want to read a prayer of our Lord, go to John 17 and read that one.

As I recall, there were about 2 billion people in the world when I was in the lower grades. Today, there are reportedly as many as 12 billion people in the world. Is that possible? Check the numbers.

When I was growing up:

1. Classes in our school began each day with Bible reading and prayer.
2. Christian symbols were posted at school, in court houses, in many public places.
3. We had prayer and the pledge of allegiance to our flag in school.

More recently, Judge Roy Moore (Supreme Court of Alabama at the time) - posted the Ten Commandments in front of his courtroom - and he was forced to take it down by a Supreme Court which sat under the same Ten Commandments when they issued that order. In fact, those Ten Commandments are also posted at the entrance of their building.

4. There has been a big change in the use of profanity in public places. There was a time when one might remind a man who used profanity that there were ladies and children present - and that person would apologize. Now, if you say anything to a person about profanity or obscene language you may risk a very unpleasant confrontation. Recently, my son John was at a supermarket when someone began using profanity (loudly). He stepped over and showed his badge (DA's Office) and suggested to a man that he watch his language. The man apologized - but if John had not had the badge there might have been a confrontation with him.

GIDEON TEARS DOWN A BAAL ALTAR (Jdg. 6:25-31)

6:25 - On that very night the Lord said to him, "Take your father's young bull and a second bull seven years old. Then tear down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. (26) Build a well-constructed altar to the Lord your God on the top of this rock. Take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down." (27) So Gideon took 10 of his male servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it in the daytime, he did it at night. (28) When the men of the city got up in the morning, they found Baal's altar torn down, the Asherah pole beside it cut down, and the second bull offered up on the altar that had been built. (29) They said to each other, "Who did this?" After they made a thorough investigation, they said, "Gideon son of Joash did it." (30) Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he tore down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it." (31) But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead Baal's case for him? Would you save him? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead his own case, because someone tore down his altar." (32) That day, Gideon's father called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead his case with him," because he tore down his altar. (Bold added by this writer)

Little commentary is needed here, so we will go on to the request from Gideon for a sign that would prove to him that it really was the Lord who was calling him to deliver His people from an evil oppression by the Midianites.

THE SIGN OF THE FLEECE

THE CIRCUMSTANCES

(First request for a sign that it was Yahweh Who was calling him):

(33) All the Midianites, Amalekites, and Qedemites gathered together, crossed over [the Jordan] , and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. (34) The Spirit of the Lord enveloped Gideon, and he blew the ram's horn and the Abiezrites rallied behind him. (35) He sent messengers throughout all of Manasseh, who rallied behind him. He also sent messengers throughout Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, who [also] came to meet him.

Now, this is amazing! "The Spirit of the Lord enveloped Gideon." How do those who reject the Trinity interpret that? If we really worship a triune God, as I am convinced true believers do, then the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the God Head, actually lived before God created the heavens and the earth, just as did the Second Person of the Trinity. Francis Schaeffer said that it was when he came to understand the Trinity that he came to embrace the Lord, for before that it seemed to him that God had to create someone with whom He might have fellowship (a relationship). There has always been fellowship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And, yes, He is the Holy Spirit, not a ghost!

This may be an unusual interpretation to some, but while we clearly see the work of the Father and the Son in Creation, where was the Holy Spirit? In Genesis 1:1, we read,

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

In John 1:1ff, we read, “1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was with God in the beginning. (3) All things were created through Him. (John 1:1-3, bold added).

The word “Word” (logos) here denotes Jesus, the Son of God, as all serious New Testament students know. But what about the Holy Spirit? Is it not possible that we find a reference to Him in the first chapter of Genesis: “ Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.” (Gen 1:2) I do not recall reading that in any commentary, but if we accept the doctrine of the Trinity we must accept the fact that the Holy Spirit was very much present at the time of the Creation.

Then, we have this statement about the Spirit of the Lord. There is something here that is absolutely amazing: “The Spirit of the Lord enveloped Gideon.” We must understand that the Holy Spirit was not created at Pentecost, He was a member of the Trinity from “the beginning” of eternity - if eternity has a beginning! Jesus certainly believed in the existence of the Holy Spirit:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:19-20, HCSB, bold added).

Jesus said of the coming of the Holy Spirit (the Counsellor):

Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send Him to you. (8) When He comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: (9) about sin, because they do not believe in Me; (10) about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see Me; (11) and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (John 16:7-11, bold added)

In Acts, we read that on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon believers and enabled them to speak in other tongues. Thousands of people from as many as seventeen different countries were in Jerusalem for Pentecost, and not leaving those people wondering what had happened, the Holy Spirit enabled the believers to speak to all those present in their own native language. They spoke in “other” tongues, not unknown tongues.

I have always wondered why those who know that the Third Person of the Trinity is a living entity still call Him The Holy Ghost - and why anyone ever translated the word ghost. I was in the hospital following surgery for something some doctor caused when he prescribed a new blood thinner (I was in the hospital for the entire month of May, 2015, and had daily wound care for the next five months, and then it was three times a week, and then two, and then one time per week. All of that because of a medical error.

It was obvious that a therapist at the hospital wanted to compare our churches (denominations), even though I was not in a debate mode during therapy. When I mentioned the Trinity and told him I believe in the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he immediately assured me that his church does not believe the Holy Spirit is a Person. He said, "The Holy Ghost is what God gives you so you can speak in tongues." I grieve for those who are misled like that, and somewhat frustrated that they try to convert others to that non-biblical view.

The Holy Spirit fills our hearts with His presence. He convicts lost people of sin and its consequences, He encourages, He strengthens, and He comforts. "The Spirit of the Lord enveloped Gideon" and He still envelops people today. He fills us and He envelops us!

FIRST REQUEST BY GIDEON FOR A SIGN

(36) Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel by my hand, as You said, (37) I will put a fleece of wool here on the threshing floor. If dew is only on the fleece, and all the ground is dry, I will know that You will deliver Israel by my strength, as You said." (38) And that is what happened. When he got up early in the morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung dew out of it, filling a bowl with water.

SECOND REQUEST BY GIDEON FOR A SIGN:

(39) Gideon then said to God, "Don't be angry with me; let me speak one more time. Please allow me to make one more test with the fleece. Let it remain dry, and the dew be all over the ground." (40) That night God did [as Gideon requested] : only the fleece was dry, and dew was all over the ground. (Judges 6:25-40, bold added by this writer).

Are believers today supposed to ask the Lord to give us signs that He is calling us, or sending us out in His name? I Have tried that! Years ago in Texas a so-called foot specialist almost destroyed my left foot, I suffered for weeks from the pain caused by this doctor's "appliance", and for a number of nights I would touch the little toe on my left foot and ask the Lord to help me get up the next morning without pain. It was never any better,, so I began quoting Scripture to the Lord, not to challenge Him, but to remind myself. A foot specialist in another city looked at my shoe, with the "appliances" on the bottom of, and inside my shoe and told me the first man had done and said, "That is a

shotgun treatment! We don't do that anymore." Then he nearly destroyed my other foot! My requests for a sign that the Lord heard me never worked. I was pastor of a strong church in Texas and when the people in my former pastorate in Bastrop, LA found out about it they asked me to return to their church. They said, "If we go to the hospital, don't you come to see me, you just pray for me."

I prayed and looked for any sign of progress, but for years there was very little improvement. I sat on a bar stool to preach for some 25 years. I had preached as many revivals as I had taught Bible studies before my feet were wiped out. After that, the invitations to teach a book of the Bible increased and the number of revivals decreased. I had to study and write with my feet elevated, or on an ice pack during those days. And still, I reminded the Lord that the "effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The HCSB renders it, "The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful" (James 5:16)

A friend came to see me when I was pastor in Forest, Louisiana and told me he was giving me his old computer. His mother was giving him a new one for Christmas. I began writing studies for various Books of the Bible and in time thought of those studies simply as my study guides. Later, I began going a little deeper and expanding with these studies and called this series, my Bible Notebook. Then, one day a good friend, the late Dr. Wayne Hamrick sent a sermon to Dr. Mike Minnix at PastorLife.Com when he was with the Georgia Baptist Convention, and that opened a new door. My Bible Notebook was expanded into commentaries, Sermons, and Articles and posted on that web site. While I missed a lot of things (hunting, fishing, playing ball with my sons), I began getting more invitations to teach various books of the Bible.

You know what I discovered during this time? The Lord had me under his wing all along! He had not forgotten me, and I got over missing preaching to a congregation that filled the sanctuary of our church, and a lot more young people than our whole congregation back in Louisiana. When I read the words from this passage: "The Spirit of the Lord enveloped Gideon", I realized that the Spirit of the Lord had enveloped me, too! I do not complain about what happened, I praise the Lord for surrounding me - and filling me - with His Spirit. I provide more details on this in my commentary on Philippians: UNDEFEAED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble. This book is posted under Commentaries under my name on PastorLife.Com.

GIDEON WAS GOD'S ANSWER

The Scripture tells us that the Midianites were totally ruthless in their attack on Israel and in the way they took everything the Israelites had. They could not have cared less if they people had starved. They took their livestock, grain, and everything the people needed to survive. Many of the people lived in caves and Gideon hid in a hole to thresh his grain. The Lord was well aware of the suffering of His chosen people. Now, that some were

calling on Him, He chose Gideon to deliver the people from this oppressive nation, and their allies, the Amalakites.

God Selects Gideon's Army

Note the Scripture:

(1) Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and everyone who was with him, got up early and camped beside the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley. (2) The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many people for Me to hand the Midianites over to you, or else Israel might brag: 'I did it myself.' (3) Now announce in the presence of the people: 'Whoever is fearful and trembling may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.' " So 22,000 of the people turned back, but 10,000 remained. Any novice in military matters today would be impressed with the number of troops who had responded to the call to fight against the pagan force that had conquered the land and oppressed the people. Let see how the Lord looked at the 32,000 soldiers, and then the 22,000. (4) Then the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many people. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. If I say to you, 'This one can go with you,' he can go. But if I say about anyone, 'This one cannot go with you,' he cannot go." (Judges 7:1ff)

The Lord had a test for Gideon and his army:

(5) So he brought the people down to the water, and the Lord said to Gideon, "Separate everyone who laps water with his tongue like a dog. Do the same with everyone who kneels to drink." (6) The number of those who lapped with their hands to their mouths was 300 men, and all the rest of the people knelt to drink water. (Bold added)

(7) The Lord said to Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and hand the Midianites over to you. But everyone else is to go home." (8) So Gideon sent all the Israelites to their tents, but kept the 300 who took the people's provisions and their trumpets. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley. (Bold added for emphasis)

Most of the men dropped to the ground and drank directly from the pool, but others leaned down and scooped up water in the palm of their hands and drank it, licking the palm to get all the water.

Why did the Lord choose only 300 men to go to war against a powerful army of "Midianites, Amalekites, and all the Qedemites" (vs. 12)? If all of the men, 32,000 of them, had defeated the enemy they may well have boasted about it. If 300 men defeated the most powerful army in the region they may well have boasted about it and forgotten that the victory was the Lord's (see 7:2). Of course, no one living in this enlightened age would ever to that, right? Wrong! It is done all the time - and you and I have done it. We have

prayed for the Lord to provide for us, but after He answers our prayers we pat ourselves on the back for coming up with a game plan for making money. We tell how we worked or how brilliant we were when we succeeded in our plan. Let us see how the Lord gave Gideon and the Israelites the victory:

(9) That night the Lord said to him, "Get up and go into the camp, for I have given it into your hand. (10) But if you are afraid to go to the camp, go with Purah your servant. (11) Listen to what they say, and then you will be strengthened to go to the camp." So he went with Purah his servant to the outpost of the troops who were in the camp. (12) Now the Midianites, Amalekites, and all the Qedemites had settled down in the valley like a swarm of locusts, and their camels were as innumerable as the sand on the seashore. (13) When Gideon arrived, there was a man telling his friend [about] a dream. He said, "Listen, I had a dream: a loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp, struck a tent, and it fell. The loaf turned the tent upside down so that it collapsed." (Bod added) (14) His friend answered: "This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has handed the entire Midianite camp over to him." (7:10ff)

GIDEON ATTACKS THE MIDIANITES

(15) When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to Israel's camp and said, "Get up, for the Lord has handed the Midianite camp over to you." (16) Then he divided the 300 men into three companies and gave each of the men a trumpet in one hand and an empty pitcher with a torch inside it [in the other] . (17) "Watch me," he said, "and do the same. When I come to the outpost of the camp, do as I do. (18) When I and everyone with me blow our trumpets, you are also to blow your trumpets all around the camp. Then you will say, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!' " (7:15-18)

There is no way those 300 men could take credit for the victory over the Midiantes. However, when the Lord promises a victory to those who do His will and follow His plan, there is no question about their military skills, their brilliance, or their strategy.

(19) Gideon and the 100 men who were with him went to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch after the sentries had been stationed. They blew their trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. (20) The three companies blew their trumpets and shattered their pitchers. They held their torches in their left hands, their trumpets in their right hands, and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" (7:19-20. Bold added)

(21) Each Israelite took his position around the camp, and the entire [Midianite] army fled, and cried out as they ran. (22) When Gideon's men blew their 300 trumpets, the Lord set the swords of each man in the army against each other. They fled to Beth-shittah in the direction of Zererah as far as the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath. (23) Then the

men of Israel were called from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, and they pursued the Midianites.” (Judges 7:19-23, HCSB)

MIGHTY VICTORY FROM A MIGHTY GOD

Senior adults in America, especially those who have grown up in the church and paid attention to what was happening in what was once called a Christian nation, can see that America, in spite of the clear message from the Word of God, has followed the same path as those ancient Israelites who followed the cycle we looked at as we began this study:

1. The Lord provided for His people.
2. They rebelled against Him.
3. He sent an evil power to judge them.
4. They repented and cried out to the Lord.
5. He sent someone to deliver them.

God has blessed America. Many are rebelling against the Lord. We are being threatened by forces that can destroy any nation. Those who rebel against the Lord place themselves in danger of His judgment. However, if we repent:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:9-10, HCSB)

Be warned, we live in a much more enlightened age than those ancient Israelites. Prophecy that had been fulfilled, the religious ceremonies followed from Sinai until the coming of Jesus were fulfilled in Jesus, who died for us and was raised from the dead to assure a victory to all who place their faith in Him.

The Lord gave us a victory in World War I and even though we were unprepared for war, and even though our leaders were completely deceived by the Japanese when they attacked Pearl Harbor, the Lord gave us a victory and made Japan a friend to America. My long time and highly valued friend, Hank Lee, spent over 30 years as a missionary to Japan. He has tried to enlighten me concerning the Japanese culture, and the difference in working with the Japanese, the Chinese and Koreans.

Following World War II, we saw what many thought was another Great Awakening in America. Southern Baptist set a mind boggling goal in 1954: A Million More in '54. They reached that goal that year and many concluded that America was on the brink of another great awakening. We thought we were reaching America for the Lord. We were not! The sixties demonstrated where we really were - and it was neither At the Cross, nor in the Word. Some churches had great revivals, and they praised the Lord for that, as they

should. However, during the sixties and seventies we discovered that America had rather play than pray! Sometimes that is carried over into the church.

The question we should be asking ourselves is, How did we get this way so fast? There has been a war between the followers of Jesus Christ and the followers of Satan, and the latter group has used every means imaginable to gain a victory over the church and over the Savior. God's people are always targets of ungodly people, groups, and movements. Politicians today are denying that the bombing of the Twin Towers was the work of Muslims. Islam, we are told by our leaders, is a religion of peace, which means our leaders - or many of them - have blinders over their eyes.

Americans prayed for our country and for our soldiers during two major wars and we thought we were beginning to see another Great Awakening. We were not. We have become a more profane society, a society that entertains itself with grossly immoral and profane movies and television shows. Television and movies show young people and young adults that they cannot have fun without drinking alcoholic beverages, even though the facts are out there for all to see. Some drink socially and insist, "I can handle it." Some can, but some cannot, and among those who do not become addicted to it, they may be placing a temptation before their children and young people that they cannot imagine.

When I was student at Mississippi College I was pastor of the Dockery Baptist Church, Cleveland, MS and I preached at the Mississippi State Prison at Parchman at 8:00 A.M. before going on to the church for the morning service. On my first visit the chaplain, Roscoe Hicks (from my home town - Sledge, the "Mississippi Cotton Pickin Delta Town", a song written by my friend Harold Dorman and made famous by Charlie Pride) asked me if I would like to meet Kenny Wagner. I had been reading that after many years on the outside, after an escape while looking of an escapee, he had surrendered because of a serious health problem. I had a nice and long visit with the most notorious criminal in the history of Mississippi and a few other states. I asked Kenny Wagner if he belied a recent study that concluded that alcohol was a factor in 94.6% of cases in which someone was convicted of a crime and sent to prison. Without any hesitation, the most famous prisoner at Parchman said, "It's higher than that. It is all of them."

While I am sure there are exceptions, if we add drugs to the study today, the percentage would be very high. Why is it then that so many young people become addicted at an early age? One man told me that he became addicted to alcohol at tailgate parties. During a time when he was intoxicated a friend invited him to go with him to another place and try something that would make him feel better. He did and he not only became addicted, he told me that when he got out of school on Friday afternoon he headed to Dalla and bought drugs from the Mexican Mafia and returned to a town in Louisiana where he sold it. I had the privilege of leading that young man to the Lord, baptizing him, and then after some period of time, preaching his ordination sermon.

The movies show people of all ages heading to a bar after work or after college classes, where they drink various alcoholic beverages and then go out and get into the automobiles and drive home, and in some cases they put our lives in danger. Young people and young adults are being deceived more and more in our society, and they may well pay a price for it.

President Obama has consistently proclaimed Islam a religion of peace. I have a copy of the Quran (Koran) in English, and if you read it you will realize that it is not a religion of peace. It is the product of the devil and his servants. Yet, some politicians are promoting Islam while trying to hinder or restrict Christianity. Government leaders often seem to be hindering the growth of the church, and if it takes encouragement to Islam to hinder Christianity many seem to be willing to risk it.

Let us pray that when we realize how far we have fallen we will repent and call on the Lord to deliver us. We need to return to a verse in the Bible that was often quoted at one time:

“... and My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land” (2 Chron 7:14, HCSB)