

Gideon

“For the LORD and for Gideon!”

Hilvert Wijnholds

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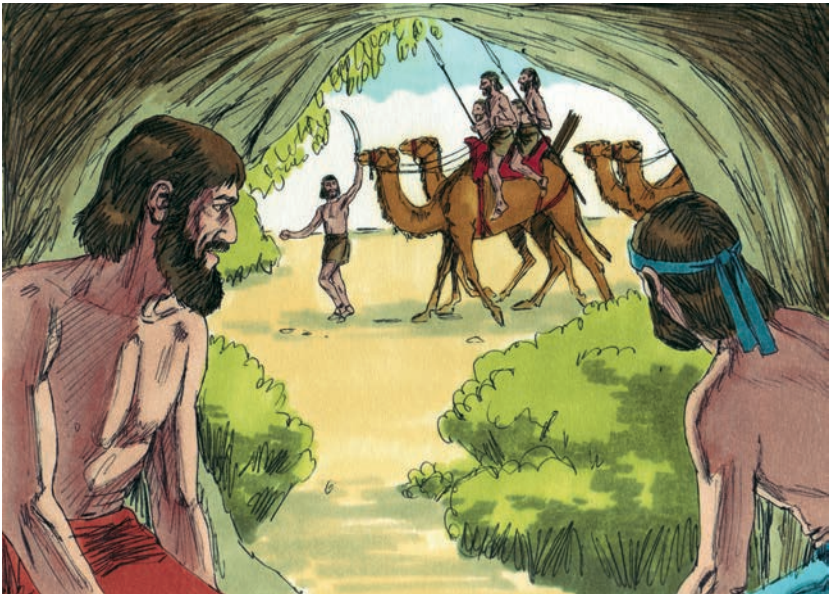
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Introduction

The book of Judges shows us, at the same time, two things:

1. The faithfulness of God.
2. And this was despite the tendency of God's people to forget His blessings and give themselves to idolatry.

After the death of Joshua the Israelites forgot that God had saved and delivered them. God then sent them trials to bring them back to Himself. Read Judges 2:10–19 carefully. The following verses show Israel on many occasions doing that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord. See Judges 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1. As soon as they cried to the Lord He sent them a deliverer (judge), but after the death of the judge they again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. That is to say, they practised idolatry.



Judges 6:1–10

In the days of Gideon Israel had again turned to idols (read Judges 6:1, 10, 25). God then permitted another people, the Midianites, to occupy the land of Israel and steal their animals and food provisions. During this occupation the Israelites hid in caves. The Midianites became numerous and the children of Israel lived in misery.

We may learn four lessons from this passage:

1. The Midianites were numerous. We are reminded here of the man called Legion who was possessed of a great number of unclean spirits. This man was delivered from Satanic power by the Lord Jesus. God had sent the Lord Jesus as Saviour. He has died for all those who believe in him; that is, those who confess their sins to God and believe that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for their sins. The Lord Jesus has also delivered them from the power of Satan. (Read Hebrews 2:14–15, 1 Peter 2:9,10.) We need to ask an important question before we continue. Dear reader, have you confessed your sins to God? Have you accepted the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour, knowing that he has also your deliverer you from the power of Satan? I have another question for those of you who are already converted: Just how much do you truly experience your salvation and your deliverance by the work of Christ on the cross? We are constantly in danger of forgetting about the Lord and what he has done for us. This forgetfulness exposes us to the influence of Satan and the world.
2. The children of Israel no longer had animals to offer to the Lord because of the Midianites. Here is one of the first serious consequences when we get away from

God: there is no longer the sacrifice of praise to God by Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

3. The children of Israel no longer had food in the land of Canaan, the land that God Himself had given unto them. Here we see the second very serious consequence: sin prevents us from enjoying the spiritual food that God desires to give us—Christ and the Word of God.
4. The children of Israel were forced to hide in caves. The third serious consequence is that testimony and witness disappear. We are called to be lights in the world (read Philippians 2:15; 1 Peter 2:9). The sin that we hide and refuse to confess prevents us from being lights in the world and from being witnesses for the Lord who has saved and delivered us.

The children of Israel again cried to the Lord and he sent them a prophet. By means of this prophet God reminded the Israelites that it was He Himself who had saved and delivered them. He was their Saviour God but they had refused to listen to his voice.

It is very sad to see Christians who live in disobedience, to such an extent that we sometimes have to ask ourselves if they are only nominal Christians and not true believers.

But if a true child of God sins and refuses to return to God, then God will chastise and discipline him. The purpose of this discipline is to bring the believer back to God to once more enjoy communion with him.

Judges 6:11–24

In the preceding passage God spoke seriously to the children of Israel. He did not immediately send them a deliverer, because he wanted them to understand the gravity of their repeated sins. Nevertheless at that same

time he was preparing a deliverer for them in secret. It was Gideon, and the angel of the Lord visited him when he was threshing grain.

Gideon's attitude is very instructive for us:

1. He tries to preserve some of the food of the country that God had given to the Israelites. We are speaking of wheat, which is a picture of the Lord Jesus (read John 12:24). How important it is for our hearts to be occupied with His person and work on the cross, found throughout the Bible! This makes us strong, and is the reason why Gideon is referred to as a mighty man of valour.
2. Gideon was not satisfied with the encouraging message that God was *with him*. He was also concerned about the *other* Israelites who had forgotten God, to such an extent that they no longer were receiving benefit from His mighty works. Let us ask the question: to what extent are we interested in the spiritual state of



our brothers and sisters in Christ? Are we concerned about them when they show a lack of faith, spiritual weakness, or hidden sin? Are we ready to bring them spiritual help, to start a spiritual conversation, even if they regard us as going against them?

3. Gideon was a humble man. He considered himself the least in his father's house (see 2 Corinthians 10:12–14).

In His great patience God twice told Gideon that he was going to be with him. In the same way we today as Christians have the promise that the Lord Jesus is going to be with us, in Matthew 28:20 and Hebrews 13:5, 6.

Gideon felt the need of offering a sacrifice to the One who spoke to him. This sacrifice was accepted, and Gideon understood that it was God Himself who spoke with Him. He was afraid, because God had said, “There shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20). But God had accepted Gideon's sacrifice and could therefore greet him with peace. Gideon then constructed an altar so that he could worship Him.

What about us as Christians? We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (see Romans 5:1). God is for us, as Romans 8:31 tells us. He invites us to worship Him in our personal lives (read Philippians 3:3). Our altar is a spiritual one (see Hebrews 10:13).

Judges 6:25–27

Here God now calls Gideon to public service. Why could God use Gideon to deliver the Israelites? Here is what we have seen so far:

1. Gideon did his best in nourishing himself with the fruit of the land that God had given to His people. This is a picture of a Christian who is constantly feeding on Christ and the Bible.
2. He does not think only of himself, but of those others who are also the people of God (read Philippians 2:21).
3. He is humble (read Philippians 2:5–9).
4. He has a personal relationship with God whom he worships with his altar (read 1 Peter 2:5).

To such a man God can commit a very difficult task. He was to destroy the idolatrous altar in his very own father's house. Gideon obeyed this difficult command that God had given to him: first of all to overthrow the altar of idolatry; then to construct an altar to the true God. These two types of altars can never exist together (read 1 Kings 18:21; 1 Corinthians 10:20-22).

God, for His part, encouraged Gideon in a very special way, saying to him, “The Lord *your* God” (Judges 6:26). In saying that, God brings out the special link between Himself and Gideon. From his side Gideon shows obedience towards his God. He does what God tells him (Judges 6:27).

Judges 6:28–35

Gideon's courageous act immediately caused opposition from the men of the city. They even wanted to kill him. But God protected his faithful servant Gideon by the intervention of his father Joash. Here we see the first fruit from Gideon's work: his father turned from Baal to God. Next the men of the city who at first wanted to kill Gideon now joined themselves to him (Judges 6:24), then his entire tribe, the tribe of Manasseh (Judges 6:35).

The enemy was not content that the altar of idolatry had

been destroyed, and the Midianites again came up against Israel. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew his trumpet. Yes, every time we take a stand for the Lord Jesus, Satan will oppose. The only means of protection against his attacks is by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the Word of God, of which the trumpet is a picture. Sometimes we find ourselves entirely alone in the conflict, isolated in the village and the family. Gideon did not however remain alone; others joined him.

1. his own father.
2. the villagers (the men of the city) who were opposed to him were transformed into his supporters.
3. the rest of the tribe of Manasseh, and later other tribes.

When we are faithful and courageous in our personal life God will bring us into contact with other believers so that we may faithfully with them follow the Lord Jesus (read 2 Timothy 2:22).

Judges 6:36–40

This passage once more shows us the goodness of God towards his servant Gideon. God is ready to respond to Gideon's needs. Gideon asked for a proof in order to be sure that God would save Israel by his hand.

The signs that Gideon requested have the following significance: the fleece of wool leads us to think of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God. The dew is a type of the blessing of heaven (read Genesis 27:28; Deuteronomy 33:28). The woollen fleece covered with dew is therefore a type of the Lord Jesus, the source of all heavenly blessings. The dry earth illustrates humanity under the power of Satan, under the curse. The second time, the dry woollen fleece is a picture of the Lord Jesus *becoming* cursed for believers

(read Galatians 3:13). The earth covered with dew now represents all those who have repented of their sins to God and who believe that the Lord Jesus has become a curse for those who are redeemed.

Gideon rose early in the morning and could see that God had answered his request. He desired personal communion with his God, and was anxious to know how He would respond.

Judges 7:1–8

Those who joined Gideon to fight the battle were very numerous: 32,000 men. We might think that the battle would be easily won by such a large number. But God knew the heart of each man, and He discerned that some were incapable of fighting the enemy. God first separated the fainthearted, in number 22,000 men (read Deuteronomy 20:8).

We as Christian believers know that the Lord Jesus has rendered powerless him that has the power of death, that is, the devil. Through the fear of death we were kept in bondage to Satan, but the Lord Jesus has delivered us (read Hebrews 2:14,15). But let us examine our hearts to see just to what extent we still fear the power of the devil. Such fear places us under the influence of those who serve Satan, such as for example witch doctors and those who use occult power. It can even happen that such fears might lead us to seek their protection instead of trusting the Lord Jesus who has completely delivered us from satanic power.

Next, God tells Gideon that He is going to test the 10,000 remaining men. It is God who does this proving. Gideon may not have had the necessary discernment for this, but God helps his faithful, courageous servant: “I will test them for you there” (Judges 7:4). We also see that this is an

action of God that tests the heart, and that shows Gideon the 300 men that God could use for the battle. Amongst the 10,000 men there were 9,700 who were only preoccupied with drinking water. They only thought about satisfying their bodily needs. But there were also the 300 who drank just the necessary amount, being more concerned with the battle against the enemy (read Philippians 2:20, 21). God therefore brought the 10,000 to drink to test them, that is, to separate away those who were not in a good state spiritually from those whose spiritual state God could approve of.

We should pray for God to act in the same manner in our local assemblies in order to purify them. The following questions are important for us:

- ◆ Can God approve of *my* spiritual state? Do I seek to purify *myself* each day, living separately from sin and in obedience to the Word of God?
- ◆ What is the spiritual state of my local assembly? Is there true separation from evil in whatever form it



- may be found? (read 1 Thessalonians 5:22).
- ◆ Is the local assembly where I am found in need of purification on the part of God?
 - ◆ Are there any who have been baptized without being converted, that is, without the fruits of repentance being seen in their lives? (read Luke 3:8; Acts 8:9–25). How many of the recently-baptized in our local assemblies continue to attend assembly meetings regularly?
 - ◆ Are any partaking of the Lord’s supper in an unworthy manner? (read 1 Corinthians 11:27–34).

These are serious questions that we should ask in God’s presence, both in regard to ourselves as believers individually, and also collectively as brothers and sisters of the local assembly.

Gideon was left with only 300 men, whereas the Midianites, the enemy, were very numerous. But God in His great mercy still encouraged Gideon. He spoke personally to him during the night, saying, “I have delivered [them] into your hand.” Gideon went down to the camp of the enemy, and there he heard one of the Midianite soldiers predict victory for Gideon.

It certainly is encouraging for us to see how God Himself takes care of His faithful servant on numerous occasions, encouraging and assuring him of victory.

Judges 7:15–22

Gideon was so encouraged by God that:

- ◆ He bowed in worship before God.
- ◆ He called the 300 men to go and fight the enemy.

On the one hand we see how Gideon remained humble: even though God had told Gideon that He would deliver the enemy into *his* hand, Gideon said to the 300 men that God would deliver them into *their* hands (read Judges 7:7 and 7:15). On the other hand he demonstrated he was a true leader who knew how to command his army with authority. Yes, the true servant of God is at one and the same time *humble* and *energetic* for God. It was therefore Gideon who acted: he divided his army into three groups; *he* put a trumpet into every man's hand with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. Then he said to them: "Look at me and do likewise." Twice in the one verse, Judges 7:17, he said the same thing. This reminds us of the words written by the apostle Paul:

- ◆ "Imitate me, just as *I also imitate Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:1).
- ◆ "*Brethren, join* in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Philippians 3:17).
- ◆ "The things which you learned and received and heard and *saw in me*, these do, and *the God of peace will be with you*" (Philippians 4:9).

Gideon gave these men a battle-cry: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." He gives the Lord the first place in this cry; afterwards Gideon mentions his own name. Gideon is not seeking an elevated place when he adds, "of Gideon." On the contrary, we have already seen that he was a humble man and that he sought fellowship with his God. Gideon then assumed the responsibility that God had committed to him (read Judges 6:16, 36, 37). He was ready for battle, and did not retreat.

The apostle Paul had also his battle-cry: "Do not be

ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner” (2 Timothy 1:8). In the same letter Paul also wrote to Timothy:

- ◆ “I have fought *the good fight*” (2 Timothy 4:7).
- ◆ “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me” (2 Timothy 4:17).

The weapons Gideon gave his men were somewhat unusual: trumpets and empty vessels with torches inside. They did not even have swords! Nevertheless their cry was, “*The sword* of the Lord and of Gideon.” From the moment that the cry was raised and the pitchers broken so that the torches could shine out, God caused the Midianite swords to turn every man against his companion. They slaughtered each other and the army fled.

The apostle Paul refers to Judges 7:15–22 in 2 Corinthians 4:6–11. It is necessary for the pitchers (referred to here as “earthen vessels”) to be broken in order for the light to shine out. We as Christian believers need to be emptied of self, and accept the setting aside of our own wills, in order for the “knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” to shine out (read 2 Corinthians 4:6). This light of the knowledge of the glory of God has reached us through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. It is through Him (“in the face of Jesus Christ”) that we have the light of knowledge of the glory of God. Paul describes the light of that glory as a treasure hidden in our bodies (“earthen vessels”). For this light to shine out, to manifest this “treasure” in us to others, God allows trials and difficulties in our lives. This leads us to trust in Him, in order that, in regard to this knowledge, “the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Gideon's men first sounded the trumpet, which for us is a picture of the Word of God. Then they displayed the light of their torches, visible from a great distance. We see here agreement between what is *heard* and what is *seen*. In other words, our testimony in the Christian life (=the light) should correspond with what we as Christians say (=the trumpets). It is very sad to see nominal Christians where the practical life is not in agreement at all with what they say or teach. It is sometimes even openly said, "Listen to what I say, but do not look at my life." This is shameful.

We now summarise the attitude of the 300 men that God could use in battle (Judges chapter 7):

- ◆ They were courageous (verse 3).
- ◆ In view of the importance of battle they only took what was necessary (verse 6).
- ◆ They were obedient to the leader God *had prepared* for them (verse 17).
- ◆ They sounded their trumpets (caused the Word of God to be heard) and shone their light (testimony) *at the same time* (verse 20).
- ◆ They had the proper battle-cry (verse 18 and 20).
- ◆ Each of them had their proper place. No one wanted to be first or take the place of another.

The question for us is: in our assemblies does each one humbly take the place that God has given him? Are there disputes between brothers in the same local assembly, between 'founding members,' 'evangelists,' 'elders,' and such-like? Such contentions destroy the life of the local assembly.

Judges 7:23–8:3

Gideon never thought he could overcome the enemy single-handedly. I once attended a Bible study in the Kasai region in the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo. One of the brothers present made the following important remark: “I need my brother.” Yes, the Lord has given differing spiritual gifts in the assembly (read 1 Corinthians 12). It is very important that we humbly exercise our own spiritual gift, and still consider the gifts of other brothers to be useful and necessary in furthering the work of the Lord. In this way Gideon called the Ephraimites to come to his help, and they proved themselves useful. But later, not content with their part in the victory, they reproached Gideon. Gideon, always humble, gave a fitting response which turned aside the anger of these brethren. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath.” There is a great difference between the soft answer of Gideon and the wounding words of Jephthah (read Judges 12:1–6). They caused anger. Again, Proverbs 15:1 says, “A harsh word stirs up anger.”

Judges 8:4–12

Despite their fatigue Gideon and his men pursued the enemy. We think again of the apostle Paul, to whom God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul came to accept this word, and as a result could say, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10).

It is very sad that the inhabitants of Succoth (verse 6) and Penuel (verse 8) refused to provide food to Gideon’s three hundred. Even though they could see that they were weary (verse 15) they mocked Gideon as if he had already won the battle. The inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel neither desired nor helped Gideon, the deliverer God had sent, nor joined battle against the enemy. In other words,

they wished to remain neutral. But spiritual neutrality is impossible in the Christian life: “He who is not with Me is against Me” (read Luke 11:23), said the Lord Jesus Himself. We therefore must choose:

I	II
The path of Satan	The path of the Lord Jesus
Spiritual darkness	The light of God
The way of death	The way of life
Curse	Blessing

Study Deuteronomy 30:17–20.

Judges 5:8, 9, 14–19, 23 also show us these two categories, as follows:

I: Those who want to remain neutral in regard to evil	II : Those who are prepared to take a stand against evil
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Reuben would not go to fight with the enemy. They had great resolves and great searchings of heart, but no decisions for God. ◆ They preferred instead to safeguard their material possessions locally (verses 15 and 16). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ There are leaders who seek to encourage the people to take a stand against evil (verses 9 and 14). Is the Lord able to find such strong spiritual leaders in our local assemblies?

<p>◆ Gilead, Dan, and Asher also did not make any movement (verse 17).</p>	<p>◆ There are those who are prepared to take a stand against evil, to the extent of risking their own life (verse 18).</p>
<p>◆ The inhabitants of Meroz did not come “to the help of the Lord,” an expression that is mentioned twice in verse 23.</p>	<p>◆ There are those who are prepared to take a stand against evil, even if they know that it will not bring material benefits in their lives (verse 19).</p>
<p>◆ These inhabitants of Meroz did not join with those who were strong for God. This sort of attitude of neutrality and indifference towards evil brings judgment from God.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← ← ← → → →</p>	<p>◆ There is a woman who is blessed among woman because she took a strong position against evil (verse 25). What an encouragement to our sisters not to keep silent when they know that sin is tolerated in their local assemblies. Brothers in such a local assembly must not disapprove of sisters like that. Any such disapproval is absolutely contrary to the Word of God, who says on this subject, “Blessed is she” (verse 24).</p>

We find three different groups at the close of the book of Judges (read chapters 19, 20, and 21):

- ◆ There are those who commit evil and refuse to judge themselves. They come under the judgment of God (chapter 19).
- ◆ There are those who do not commit sin themselves, but who associate with evil-doers. They are not willing to judge evil in others, and come under the same judgment from God (chapter 20).
- ◆ There are those who remain neutral in regard to sin. They do not disassociate from it, neither do they judge it. They also come under the judgment of God (chapter 21).

This neutral attitude in regard to evil is therefore something that is very serious in the sight of God. What is the position in our local assemblies? Are we ready to help our brothers and sisters who have been turned aside, by speaking to them of their low spiritual state?



Judges 8:13–21

Gideon, we saw, turned aside the anger of the Ephraimites by a soft answer. This concerns those who had joined Gideon in combat against the enemy. Their jealousy did not lead Gideon to distance himself from them; instead he calmed them down by emphasizing their part in the battle against the enemy of God's people. But the inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel did not participate with Gideon. On the contrary, they refused to help the faithful men fighting the enemy. Gideon then punished them severely (verses 16, 17). He did not carry out this chastisement, however, without finding out in advance the names of those responsible (verse 14; read also Deuteronomy 19:15 and Numbers 35:30).

Judges 8:22–32

The children of Israel wanted Gideon to rule over them. But Gideon continued to remain humble. He knew it was not himself that had achieved the victory over the enemy. He was the instrument in the hands of God. Therefore he replied, "The Lord shall rule over you." Such a humble attitude is very beautiful. May each one of us be enabled to take such a place in the midst of our brothers and sisters in our local assemblies.

In various passages we have seen that Gideon lived his life in close proximity to God. He drew near to God in prayer, and God spoke to Him. This relationship of Gideon with his God was founded on the sacrifice he had offered (read Judges 6:22–24).

Christ, the perfect sacrifice, is the Mediator between God and men. It is only through Him that we may approach God (read Hebrews 10:19; 1 Peter 2:5). No Christian, no matter how close he lives to God, can be a mediator between God and men. Any who make such a claim are presumptuously and falsely taking the place that can only belong to Christ.

Now we come to Gideon's error in later life. He made for himself an ephod, which was part of the special dress of the high priest, who was the link between God and His people in the Old Testament. But Gideon had not been called to priestly service. In making an ephod he was taking to himself a service that was not his. Although he was a faithful servant, he was not a son of Aaron, and was not entitled to take up this service (read also 2 Chronicles 26:16–21). It was as if he was placing himself between God and the people.

What spiritual lessons do we learn from this?

- ◆ We should not accept someone who takes a clerical position in our midst. Christ is the only Mediator.
- ◆ We must not confuse service *for* God with the worship *of* God, neither in our personal lives, nor in local assembly meetings. We serve God by preaching the gospel and teaching the Word of God. Here we see a service or a work done *for* God. Such work is directed manwards. Worship, in contrast, is directed Godwards. It is service *to* God, thanksgiving from our heart going up to God. We give Him thanks for the Lord Jesus and for His work on the cross. How much time do we set aside in our assembly gatherings for praise and adoration? Do we not have to acknowledge that often most of the time is given over to preaching and singing? Often there is a mixture of service for God combined with the worship of God: I mean when a brother is teaching the Word during the breaking of bread to such an extent that there are very few hymns of adoration and little room for prayers of thanksgiving. These matters are important, because the Father seeks those who worship Him in spirit and truth. He is surely worthy of this! (see John 4:23, 24).

The ephod Gideon made soon became an idol for Israel and a stumbling-block for himself and his house. It is sad to see such a faithful servant finishing his life in this way. It is a solemn warning for us, to remain close to the Lord, and not to fall into the snares that Satan sets for us.

Judges 8:33–35

After the death of Gideon the children of Israel once again forgot what God had done for them. They no longer remembered the salvation and deliverance brought to them by God. The blessings brought to them by Gideon, their saviour and leader, were forgotten. What a sad ending to this account of the life and service of Gideon! What a warning for us! But God Himself has given us this warning, the One who loved us so much that He gave His only-begotten Son to save us from our sins, and to deliver us from the power of Satan.

By His prophet Jeremiah God has told us certain things about His people Israel:

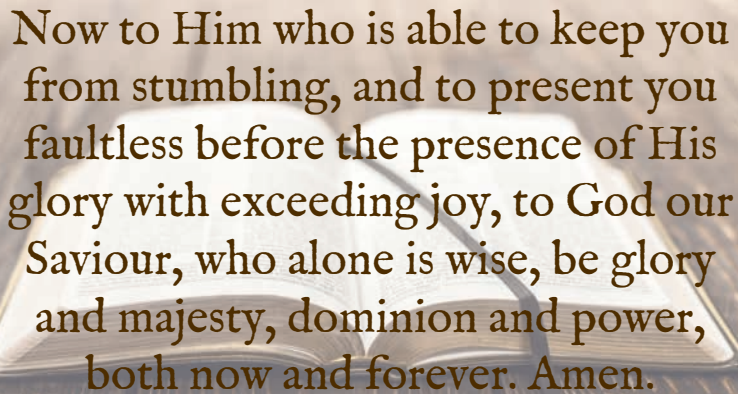
1. “You have forsaken the Lord your God” (Jeremiah 2:19).
2. “My people have forgotten Me” (Jeremiah 2:32).
3. “Therefore hast thou also accustomed thy ways to wickedness” (Jeremiah 2:33 in Darby Translation).
4. “She has been rebellious against Me” (Jeremiah 4:17).

What decline! *Forsaking* is followed by *forgetfulness*, then *being accustomed to wickedness*, and finally *rebellion against God*.

We can trace this decline in professing Christendom, but let us not look at others. Each of us needs to examine himself, and ask the following questions:

- ◆ Am I prepared to commit myself totally to the Lord

- Jesus, who was prepared to suffer and die to save me?
- ◆ Am I willing to take a pronounced and clear stand against evil? In my personal life? What about in my local assembly?
 - ◆ Am I ready to face opposition *when God calls me to faithfully serve Him like Gideon*, even if the opposition comes from my own brothers?

An open book with text overlaid on it. The text is in a serif font and is centered on the page. The background is a warm, golden-brown color with a subtle texture.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

(Jude 24, 25)

