

“If the Lord is with us, then why has all this happened?” I was working under an oak tree when it happened. I was feverishly trying to harvest our wheat before the next attack happened. For seven long years the Midianites had been swarming through our lands and destroying our crops and killing our animals. We were barely surviving year to year because of it. And honestly, the last 200 years before this had also been a struggle. When we had entered the ***“promised land”*** under Joshua things had initially gone pretty well from our perspective. We had won lots of victories and established a foothold in this land. But ever since then things had been up and down. It felt like we were in constant battles and fights with our neighbors. Where was the **peace** we had been hoping for? Why didn’t we have the peace that had been **promised** to us by the Creator?

At that moment, the angel suddenly appeared and said to me, ***“The Lord is with you.”*** I was shocked by this statement and responded, ***“If the Lord is with us, then why has all this happened to us? Where are the miracles of his deliverance? The Creator has abandoned us!”*** Ignoring my questions and my anger, the angel said to me, ***“Go and save Israel.”*** I said, ***“How am I to save Israel? My family is the least in my tribe and I am the least in my own family!”*** The Creator said to me, ***“I will be with you, and you will overcome Midian as one man.”*** Then the Creator’s angel disappeared and I was terrified at what had just happened. I said to myself, ***“I have seen the Lord’s angel face to face!”*** We all knew what would happen if we saw the Creator face to face—we would die. Then the Creator’s voice came to me, ***“Peace be with you. Do not be afraid. You will not die. Tear down the altars and idols of your family and build an altar to me in their place.”*** I was terrified to do this, knowing what the backlash against me would be. But I did not want to disobey this almighty voice. So that night, under the cover of darkness, I went and destroyed the idols of my family and city and built an altar to the Creator. The next morning the people of the city awoke and were angry. They eventually figured out that I was the one who had done this and they said to my father, ***“Your son Gideon needs to die!”*** But my dad said, ***“If the gods are real, then they can defend themselves! If the gods want Gideon dead, then they can handle it themselves!”*** So the people left me alone and waited for the gods to do something. But nothing happened—I didn’t die. The so-called gods we had been worshipping didn’t touch me.

The people of Israel were amazed that I had survived and they began following me. But it was too little, too late. Thousands upon thousands of Midianites were gathering in the valley of Jezreel, which was right in the heart of our lands. They were getting ready to invade us and destroy our crops and animals once again. I was **terrified**. How was I supposed to save our people from so many soldiers?! Was the Creator any more real than our other gods? Was the vision I had seen even real? I was beginning to doubt myself. There were 32,000 men that had gathered to follow me, but that was not nearly enough. Then the Creator spoke to me, ***“You have too many men. For you will boast and think you saved yourselves. Send away all the men who are afraid.”*** So 22,000 soldiers left and we were down to 10,000 men. I began to get really nervous. Then the Creator said, ***“You still have too many men.”*** So he commanded me to send all the men down to the water’s edge to drink. Those who trustingly stuck their faces directly into the water to drink could stay. But everyone who kept their heads up in **wariness** had to be sent home. Only 300 men were trusting enough to drink without keeping an eye on the horizon. I was starting to **panic**. Only 300 men against the innumerable and countless swarms of Midianites?! I was more **afraid** than ever. But then one of our men said he had a dream. He saw a loaf of bread roll down a hill into the camp of the Midianites and knock over their tents, defeating them. It made me laugh and it strengthened my spirit.

So we gathered into three groups of 100 men. We each had a trumpet in one hand and a covered torch in the other—**no swords**. We surrounded the camp of the Midianites in the middle of the night and then all at once we blew our trumpets, uncovered our torches, and shouted. The Midianites woke up confused and began to **fight each other** and then **ran away** into the darkness. The Creator had delivered us. We had done nothing but listen and obey. We had done nothing but **trust** in his strength and not our own. But I couldn’t leave well enough alone. I wanted to get their kings, thinking that if I did, then they wouldn’t ever attack us again. So we chased after two of their kings and captured them. I **killed** them myself. The people of Israel were so thrilled that they wanted to make me their king. I refused and said that the Creator alone was king. But I asked the people to give me the gold and jewels from our plunder of the Midianites. Then using those **riches** from Midian we made a very fancy priestly garment. Eventually we all began to worship that garment, thinking that through it we had the protection of the Creator. And before we knew it, we were right back to where we started. We were **no better** than the idolatrous generation that had come before us.

“If the Lord is with us, then why has all this happened?” This was the question I had asked the Creator. And as I lived my life, the answer became clear and obvious. Why had Midian attacked us relentlessly? Because 200 years earlier when we had been in the wilderness with Moses we had **attacked** Midian after they had tried to curse us. We had **killed** every Midianite man, **captured** all their women and children, **taken** all their animals and wealth for ourselves, and **burned** all their cities and camps to the ground. And unsurprisingly, Midian wanted **revenge**—they had never forgotten what we had done to them. They were doing to us what we had done to them. We had **lived** by the sword as we attacked Midian and now we were **dying** by the sword as we were being attacked by Midian. The Creator had told us that we must not become like the nations around us. The Creator had told us that destroying the idols and false gods of this land was our most important task. We had **not** done that. We had not torn down the altars of the people. Instead we had become like the people of this land and had worshiped their same gods. We too worshiped **violence**, we too worshiped **wealth** and **riches**, we too worshiped our own **intelligence** and **strength**. We did not tear down those altars. Instead we worshiped at those altars. So the Creator gave us over to those gods—to the gods of violence, wealth, and self-reliance. The Creator said to us, ***“Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen. See if they can save you from trouble.”*** And we did cry out to the gods of violence, wealth, and self-reliance, hoping they would help us. But they never saved us, we always ended up more **miserable** than before.

“If the Lord is with us, then why has all this happened?” You might also be asking this question in your life. You might be wondering why there is so much social and political turmoil in our society and world. You might be wondering why tragic things have happened in your life. You might be wondering why there is so much suffering all around us and within us. ***“If the Lord is with us, then why has all this happened?”*** We don’t love the Creator with **all** our minds, **all** our hearts, **all** our bodies, and **all** our souls. We hold back. We divide our lives and loyalties. We worship false gods. We trust in the idols of human **invention** and **innovation** to solve all our problems. We trust in **violence** to protect us. We trust in **possessions** to provide for us. We trust in these **false gods** and they inevitably **fail** us. We cry out to the gods of violence, wealth, and self-reliance and they are powerless to help us—they end up ruining our lives and the lives of those around us. But the Creator patiently **stays with us**. He never leaves us, he never forsakes us. ***“If the Lord is with us, then why has all this happened?”*** The Lord disciplines those he loves. The troubles, pains, sufferings, and tragedies all around you have happened because the Creator **loves** you and **all** of his creation. The Creator loves you enough to discipline you, to challenge you, and to push you beyond your limits so you might trust and lean on him and **not** on yourself. The Creator allows sufferings to bombard you to make you helpless and weak. The Creator wants you helpless and weak so you will return to his love with **all** your mind, **all** your heart, **all** your body, and **all** your soul. ***“Why has all this happened?”*** Because the Creator loves us. **Amen.**