

Warriors, Christmas and Spiritual Awakening
By Rev. Chris Meier

It sounds like an oxymoron: warriors and Christmas. After all, the consummate feel-good holiday— and the one I love the most— connected with soldiers, battle and war? Let me share with you the timing I experienced surrounding this word. I didn't realize its significance until I started to write. Between the beginning of August and September 15, I sensed the Lord lay this word in my spirit. I made written and voice notes, perceiving this was to become something I needed to share on this site, as opposed to something to share with the church first. Unfortunately, life got very busy and it became near impossible for me to write this article until now, close to what we in the West celebrate as the Savior's birth.

While I was chiding myself for taking so long to write, the Holy Spirit started to "nudge" me to look at the dates I first received this word. I received it on two occasions smack in between two Jewish holidays. The first one is not well known among non-Jews. It is Tisha B'Av. This holiday has become a day of remembrance and fasting to observe various calamities which have occurred to the Jews on the ninth of Av (Jewish monthly calendar). The tradition observes the fact that ten of the twelve spies Moses sent out to reconnoiter the land came back with a bad report, and the people believed them, instead of the word of the Lord and the good report of the two other spies (Joshua and Caleb, see Numbers 13 & 14). Various other calamities since then have happened to the Jewish people on or near this calendar day.

These calamities carry with them military overtones, since Jewish defenses were overcome and the people were taken captive. Here is the list: the fall of the first and second Temples; the loss of various revolts to the Romans leading up to the continued sacking of Jerusalem; the first Crusade; expulsion from England; expulsion from France; expulsion from Spain; World War I; the mass deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto. Lastly, we have the bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and more recently, the forced removal of Jews from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

All of these events have occurred on or near this date on the Jewish calendar. Because of differences between our calendar and the Jewish calendar, Tisha B'Av will fall on different days in our western calendars in different years. Since the Jewish people have always had smaller population numbers in comparison to other ethnicities, any event which has the potential to take many lives is calamitous. Any

event in any country which takes the lives of large groups of people always carries with it military as well as national security implications. This year the observance fell on August 1.

Rosh Hashanah started this year on September 21. It celebrates the beginning of the year: Rosh (head) of the (Ha) year (Shanah). It starts or kicks off the rest of the Jewish High Holy Days with the Blowing of Trumpets. While the Jewish month Tishri is the seventh month of the ecclesiastical year, it is the first month of the civil year and is celebrated to commemorate the traditional anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve. The blowing of the shofar (rams' horn) is meant to wake the spiritually sleeping out of their slumber and to alert them of any coming judgment, hence the beginning of prayers and Bible reading in synagogues. In some traditions it is customary to read prayers and verses which casts off sin far and away, even symbolically into water, and to extol the glory of God, proclaiming His glory to cover the earth as the waters cover the seas (Habakkuk 2:14). Although, quite a few of the Jewish practices for this holiday celebrate it exclusively as it is found in the Torah, rejecting all Babylonian influence. They believe it is to be celebrated with shouting and rejoicing because nothing is said in the Torah about doom and gloom.

It should be mentioned that Tisha B'Av would not have been a day to commemorate calamity had the Jews believed the report of the two faithful witnesses Moses sent out (Joshua and Caleb), instead of the ten negative ones. It should also be noted that many Bible scholars believe had the Jews not grumbled and complained, forty years of wandering in the desert would not have happened, including all these other calamities.

I said all of that to share this: I believe the Lord is raising up a company of warriors able to fight and prevail in spiritual matters which see earthly results. These souls are being raised up to help mankind, in spite of mistakes made. While our Lord is always raising up people to accomplish certain tasks, there comes a moment in time when we need specialists. People live inside of *time*. Time waits for no one, so it's important to function when it is *your* time. Two examples were highlighted to me: Gideon and David. Neither of these men were perfect; in fact, one had a self-image problem and the other made quite a few mistakes, in spite of many successes. So I believe the Lord is not looking for us to be perfect, just to follow and obey Him. He will take care of the rest.

Let's look at Gideon first, since he appears in our timeline first. For those of you who wish to follow along in your Bibles, turn to Judges 6. This timeframe in

Jewish history is called the “judges” for a reason. This was before they asked God to give them a king in order to be like all other nations. So before the “kings” show up, the judges guided the people through various different events. The last judge before Gideon is Deborah. The book of judges records her successes with the last entry of a song/poem of victory dedicated to extolling the victories of God and His people, Israel, over their enemies. Judges 5 ends abruptly with the beginning of Chapter 6, telling us that time has passed and events have changed because “Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years” (KJV, Judges 6:1).

Unfortunately, this becomes a recurring theme throughout most of the Old Testament for Israel. Once you understand this, you understand the calamities and their effect on the Jewish people and the remembrance of these events with the holy day of Tisha B’Av. We’re told in Judges 6:2-6, that it has gotten so bad Israel’s enemies come up like grasshoppers and destroy all her harvests by stealing and taking everything they can lay their hands on, including livestock. This causes Israel to hide and live in caves and “strongholds.”

Judges 6:11 opens up with our “hero” Gideon looking like anything but a hero. He is hiding his wheat by threshing it near a winepress. For those of you who may miss the reference because we no longer thresh wheat or use winepresses, the two don’t go together. You wouldn’t expect to see someone getting rid of “trash” from their grain near a place where they took fruit to be pressed into liquid. In order to remove the chaff you would lightly rub the grain and then toss it in the air. The lighter chaff or husks would be caught by the wind and the heavier grain would fall to the ground or into the winnowing apparatus. A winepress needs to keep any garbage material like this from liquid because the catch basin would screen for seeds or skins, but not necessarily this garbage-laden type of husks grain produces.

It’s a desperate measure to try to hide one process near another. It certainly doesn’t speak of a brave soldier holding down the fort. Yet our angel in this story addresses Gideon by calling him a “mighty man of valor.” How Gideon responds to this salutation is where we realize how imperfect a man of valor Gideon really is. He ignores the angel’s nomenclature and instead starts to blame God for their troubles. Challenging the angel’s statement of “the Lord is with you” by basically saying, no, He’s not. My paraphrase goes something like this: “Oh, really? Then why has all this bad stuff happened?”

As I said, not full of valor and certainly not full of faith. But the Lord ignores his question and makes this statement: “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel

from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee” (Judges 6:14)? The Lord is basically saying, “Look, do what I’m telling you to do with whatever stamina you can muster up and I’ll do the rest.” Now, when God says to do something, it’s a wise thing to go ahead and do it. But this is not what Gideon does right away. Instead, he argues with God: “Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Judges 6:15).

I have to confess and say I’ve disagreed with some of the things the Lord has told me to do, and told Him as much. It seems God never looks on us the same way as we look on ourselves. Where we see lack, God knows His abundance. Where we see inability, God moves in His ability. The Lord encourages Gideon some more by telling him what He said before: God will be with you. Gideon has three problems. One, he doesn’t know who he is; two, he doesn’t believe who God tells him he is; and three, he doesn’t know who God is. Isn’t this a similar problem many of us have today? If we really believed we were who God said we are, we would step out and do some incredible things.

Gideon does the customary thing from that region of the world by asking the angel to wait while he prepares an offering. After he does so, the Lord tells Gideon to destroy the altar of Baal in his community. Gideon is so afraid to do this that he goes at night, in the dark, and not in the daylight. When the men of the city awake the next morning and see the altar destroyed they investigate and find it was Gideon who did it. They go to his house, but his father, Joash, defends him and prevents his son’s death, by mocking Baal. In other words, if Baal is really a God, then he can defend his own altar. Call me misinformed, but I see two things here. One, Gideon is not exactly full of courage, since it’s his father who wins the argument over Gideon’s potential murder at the hands of the village elders. Two, if faith is inherited at all, now we see who really has it in the family, and potentially where Gideon could draw from to get his own.

We must all have our own salvation moment with Jesus. All of us must reach out to Him as individuals. There are no go-betweens in our relationship with Christ. But what children see experienced in a household has effect on them. That’s why so many marriages fail. When they go to draw on experiences from their own childhoods to answer and fill in the gap for their own marriages, they sometimes fill it in with controversy and even violence because that’s what they saw exhibited to them. It’s only because of Who God Is that people who never experience biblical faith in their own homes growing up can come to a salvation moment. When hardship hits many people and they turn to God, quite often they turn to Him with

the same attitudes they saw concerning faith from their childhoods. If Gideon saw the same faith exhibited growing up that we see his father have toward the village leaders when they come to take his son, Gideon has the potential to become a mighty warrior, indeed. We can now see the possible qualities the Lord saw in Gideon.

Gideon assembles an army, but we still don't see the brave general or soldier God says Gideon is. Gideon does what baby Christians have been fond of doing ever since: he bargains with God. We have a term for it called "putting out a fleece." The scenario goes something like this: God tells you something is going to happen or He wants you to do something. We say something like "Okay, if that's really YOU speaking, then let this happen this way or that way." The underlying theme here is if it doesn't happen a certain way then it wasn't God speaking and we don't have to do it, or we won't see events go a certain way. My first pastor told us this was a baby Christian way of doing things because baby Christians don't have the same level of faith in hearing God and His word. The Lord does honor this request when our faith is genuine and we are really trying to discern whether it is truly God speaking.

He honors it in Gideon's case by allowing the fleece or sheep's skin to be dry when it should have been wet and wet when it should have been dry. The writer of the book of Hebrews says it this way: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (KJV, Hebrews 4:12-14).

The army Gideon has assembled moves to a place called Haran (Judges 7:1). I love the Hebrew language because even the name of a place indicates what's going on. The word *haran* in Hebrew means *trembling*. What I have always found amazing in this story is the sheer size of the army. Judges tells us that a total of 32,300 men show up. Knowing what's in the heart of man, God tells Gideon that there are too many men for the fight. When they win, Israel will claim it was due to their army or its size that they won, and not the hand of the Lord. It should be noted that Gideon was going up against an army probably ten times or more his army's size. So God tells Gideon to let those who tremble with fear go home. They have assembled by the *spring of trembling*, and those who tremble, can go home. God does have a sense of humor. Twenty-two thousand take him up on his offer.

God decides there are still too many and he has Gideon thin the ranks some more. Finally, He says to Gideon that those who bend down to drink from the “spring of trembling” can leave, while those who instead are wary, like a dog, and lap the water—presumably from their own hands—are superior in battle and can stay and fight. This leaves Gideon with 300 men. If we think Gideon was nervous before, this situation does not make him feel any better, and God knows it! He tells Gideon to go to the enemy’s camp and “eavesdrop” on their conversations. Gideon overhears a dream one of the sentries has in which a stale cake of barley bread rolled down the hill and hit one of their tents and knocked it over. The other man interprets the dream to mean Gideon and Israel will knock their armies down. Barley was the poor man’s grain. It was harvested early. The Jewish people identified with barley at that time since it was believed to have been harvested on many significant occasions in their history. This dream and its interpretation gives Gideon the courage to believe what God has been telling him all along.

Needless to say, the battle was won and Israel was restored. Gideon still needed an excellent battle strategy to “fool” the enemy and get them to turn on one another. He also needed those he sent home to become teams outside the initial battlefield to scoop up the stragglers of enemy soldiers and to capture their leaders. God knows our weaknesses and wants to give us success in what He has called us to do, regardless of whether he picks us the first time around, or we enter the fray in the latter stages of a spiritual event.

It’s the little foxes who spoil the vine (Song of Solomon 2:15). This verse is used to indicate little events or actions which cause us great trouble. If negative things can do so, how about little positive or beneficial things we do? Why can’t they cause us awesome benefits? We may come from less than humble conditions. We may not have been chosen first. We may have to jump some hoops, learning lessons in hearing God more perfectly and learning His ways more intimately. When we do, and we don’t despise the *way* He teaches us of *smaller things*, we will see success; not only for us, but even for our entire communities.

Before we leave Gideon’s example, we should understand the need to “capture the stronghold.” The stronghold in this case were the waterways. Remember that Israel was hiding in various poorly defended “strongholds.” Those were but secondary, emergency places. The real source of strength were not those, but the waterways. They provided transport to move goods as well as armies, and they provided sustenance. Gideon commands the capture of these critical areas to prevent future captivity. He also commands those who were sent home to capture the two enemy leaders. Their names are Oreb and Zeeb, which interpreted from the Hebrew mean

raven and wolf. Ravens are small scavengers and wolves run in packs to hunt. Once we understand the ways of the Lord and how He speaks and how He wins battles, we understand the need to take authority over small enemies and team up to dispel the larger threats (Judges 8:21).

If I may for a moment relate some of Gideon's experience to our modern church age, we have a *numbers problem*. What I mean by that is we believe we must be a large church congregation to see signs, wonders and a move of God. Gideon's story would stress otherwise. I have no problem with churches who have large numbers; in fact, as far as I'm concerned, the more the merrier. We just have to be able to tell the difference between numbers and what we are accomplishing in the spiritual realm and how that translates to our neighborhoods and communities. Do we, as a group, tackle the drug-prostitution epidemics in our communities or do we watch them from closed doors? I can attest to having had these neighborhood problems and having to engage in both action and prayer on a continual basis to see them removed from our immediate area. We are small in number, but we also needed teams from outside the neighborhood to help.

Next, it seems from Gideon's story that he doesn't realize God's ability until his numbers are dwindled down by the Lord. It is an unfortunate reality, but all of us humans tend not to 'bother' the Lord until we have a great calamity or need. And yet, it's that *need* which compels and moves us to prayer on a continual basis which receives the answers we *need* in times of distress. Quite frequently, small churches don't realize the power they have in prayer simply because their unity is stronger by their smaller numbers. Usually churches with larger congregations have far more drama and unity issues than churches with smaller numbers. America became a great nation with small, community-based churches dotting the land. The body of Christ first grew from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth because small, house churches, led by homeowners or householders— yes, many were women— took the known world for Jesus. Signs and wonders followed the preaching of God's word from those saints, and the worldwide church grew.

We don't have the space to tell of all the exploits of David. The beginnings of these two men were so very different. From the start we see the Lord teach David how to defeat an enemy. It would be the young children who would tend the flocks and herds. It was so in David's case. The youngest of Jesse's sons, we first hear that God has a king secreted away among them is in 1 Samuel 16:1. It's in these verses of Scripture where we learn just how differently the Lord looks upon humankind when it comes to leadership and accomplishment. The prophet Samuel has come to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king. Seven of them are viewed by Samuel. He thinks

they have a winner from the very first strapping specimen he sees. But God says this: “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:17).

This one verse sums up the whole of this example. When Samuel finally meets David, he is not the accomplished outward success of his brothers. He’s small but good looking, and performing the menial task of tending the flocks. But it’s in the small things that David learns some of his greatest battle strategies. He learns how to fight the lion and the bear. He learns that in order to do this small job he must protect all the little lambs, and not one is unimportant. Those lessons learned of battle and worship are the lessons that stayed with David for his entire life. They are the lessons which get him out of trouble when he gets himself into trouble later on.

Let me take a sideways jaunt here, possibly one some of you may not like. Don’t we have a man in the White House that many find totally incapable of leadership qualities; one who many find repugnant for the job? But remember, God does not look upon mankind like we do. He has seen a person’s battles, struggles and lessons learned. He has seen how they really treat people, and he knows what’s in the heart of man. There are always two opinions of people and events going around. If I may take our initial analogy a bit further: there’s always the negative opinion of ten spies to the positive opinion of two others. There’s the opinion everyone talks about (media, colleagues, acquaintances, friends and family), and then there is God’s opinion.

As I said in the beginning of this article, I believe the Lord has been spending a human lifetime raising up people nobody thinks can do a job, for a certain time and hour to do some pretty amazing jobs. They are even being raised up now as children for a future generation. They may not look like much. Many have been raised “on the backside of the desert” in obscurity and lack. They may have been raised in distress and poverty. They may even have little or no faith. Some have been and are now being raised up in God-fearing homes. They have learned the lessons God teaches from His word. They have learned how to cast out the little foxes that spoil so much; those things which entrap as well as distract us. They have learned that faith is grown, not bought. Sure, money can be the tool God uses as a lesson in growing faith, but money is not their source. They have learned how to speak forth the word of God in action as the Lord releases them to do so, thereby setting another lamb free from the jaws of the lions and bears out there.

They have learned another lesson: How to sacrifice to our Lord that which is necessary when He tells them to. In this way they will learn the lesson that can connect Christmas to warfare, soldiers and victory. Laying down one's life in the cause of Christ for liberty and freedom is the embodiment of the Christmas story. That small, helpless babe, considered so unimportant while growing up becomes the corner stone, the gateway for all humans to be set free from sin and death.

One small prayer of faith: "I believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. Come into my heart, Jesus. I repent of my sin; forgive me. Be my Lord, my Savior and my very best friend. Holy Spirit, show me how to live, lead and guide me all the days of my life; Amen." It's a small prayer. In fact, I can't tell you how many times folks will say to me, "that can't be it. All I do is believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that God raised Jesus from the dead" (Romans 10:9 & 10)? Yep, that's it; believe and walk with Jesus, listen to the Holy Spirit, read His word and obey Him.

Our Jewish brethren have come to learn the hard way that it's those small actions which can lead to great victories in battle or great defeat, depending upon what action you take. A baby is such a small thing to celebrate at Christmas. The Bible tells us that this "baby" grew up to defeat the combined spiritual forces of evil. If mankind will take that small step in belief, Jesus will deliver captured humanity and a fractured creation to be raised up, even after death, into everlasting life.

Only Almighty God can win a war, rescue captive people and open the door for the Holy Spirit to revive, awaken and draw human hearts back to the Savior by sending a baby. God never fights battles in the flesh by the flesh. He always starts with a spiritual component called faith. It's small and initially unseen. He uses that component to compel human flesh to win battles that eventually we do see. He takes the weak, the ordinary and the mundane— even the profane— cleans them up and makes a strong nation out of them. After all, it's this same Being who made brilliant stars, galaxies and the vast outreach of space from tiny atoms and minuscule particles.

It's this same Being who created you, knows you and knows why you were created. You have a purpose, and God has a plan. Connecting His plan and purpose with who you are is the best Christmas gift you could be given. To start, it's as simple as a tiny prayer (Romans 10:9 & 10). If you would like us to pray with you, hit the contact button on this website or go to the ministry's Facebook page and contact us there. If you live in our neck of the woods and would like to stop by for prayer, Bible study or other occasion, please don't hesitate to contact us and ask for

the holiday schedule. For all others, on behalf of the ministry, Let me wish you A MERRY CHRISTMAS, and a safe and healthy New Year.