

*The Lord's Presence*  
*Growing Through Challenges, Part 1*

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We all have self-doubts to some extent, and in the spiritual arena they can show up quite a lot, especially in the areas where we struggle. In our story, Gideon is constantly questioning himself and the Lord's presence and protection in his decisions.

The book of Judges has a recurring cycle: 1) The children of Israel turn from the Lord and worship other gods; 2) they are conquered by other nations and suffer; 3) they cry out to the Lord who raises up a judge; and 4) the judge frees them and they experience a time of peace.

In our story, the Israelites turn from the Lord and are conquered by the Midianites. Midianites were nomads who took over, ate all there was, then left. They were not interested in a sustainable economy so they took everything. They came like locusts. Imagine the Israelites seeing a hoard of camels running over a hill, giving them no time to prepare. They simply ran and hid in caves while the Midianites took their food. When we turn away from the Lord's protection, selfish emotions can swarm and overwhelm us in similar ways.

Enter Gideon, the most reluctant of the judges to take the challenge to lead. He was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it, rather than on a big threshing floor. Gideon, of the tribe of Manasseh, represents an external desire to do what is good, and this is depicted in threshing wheat (goodness) in a winepress (truth). In particular, this action means exploring and examining how to do what is good (*Apocalypse Revealed* 651).

In our story an angel of the Lord appears to Gideon as he's threshing wheat and says, "Jehovah is with you, you mighty man of valor!" Gideon's response is unsurprising: "O my lord, if Jehovah is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about...?" Similarly, the Lord comes to us saying He is with us, and because of this we have power and can be brave in the face of our challenges. We, wrapped up in the problems we are facing, doubt His presence because the simple fact is life's not going well for us right now. "If Jehovah is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"

We know the Lord is always present: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me." (Psalm 23:4) And yet we still feel alone, particularly in times of spiritual trial, or temptation. At this time "we suppose the Lord to be absent," and sometimes "can scarcely believe there is any God" even though "the Lord is then more closely present than we can ever believe" (AC 840). The Lord says that we need to feel alone at some level because we have to fight as if it all depended on us. If we sensed the Lord's presence, we'd step aside and ask Him to fight. He needs us to fight as if by ourselves, and when we do that He can do the real fighting, but unseen by us.

In our story, Gideon wants a sign that the Lord is with Him, so he prepares food and brings it to the angel, who tells him to put it on a rock and then touches it with His staff, and fire comes out of the rock, consuming it. This stands for taking our efforts and our desires and knowledge to

the Lord. He says put them on the rock – take them to the rock of truth, the Word. The Lord is saying that if we bring our best efforts to the Lord and submit them to the truths in the Word, His love (fire) and His power (staff) will be present.

Gideon in us needs many more signs, as we will see. But this was a start that moved him from hopelessness to hope, from inaction to action.

Lessons: Judges 6:1-24; *Arcana Coelestia* 4735:2, 840