

Kyrie Eleison

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.
And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:
And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children,
and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house,
and when thou walkest by the way,
and when thou liest down,
and when thou risest up.”*

Brushing aside the opening to his tent, the great warrior—broad in his shoulders and mighty in his hands—stepped out into the open air. Gideon Ben Abiel (גִּדְעוֹן בֶּן אֲבִיאל) looked out over the flatness.

Red dust blew over the surface of the ground. There were few bushes and fewer trees to take root and secure the soil against the constant wind. Gideon’s camp, the camp of the emergent Israelite nation, lay just beyond the west bank of the Jordan River. Though they had entered into the land promised to their ancestors, the land they had awaited for so many years, the desert still clung to them. The honey of the land lay within the stone walls of the resident nations.

The camp was mostly quiet now as the wind blew. Early that morning, the priests of Israel and its army had left to march around Jericho for the sixth time. When they had finished, the men returned and many went back to their tents for rest. The entire nation was restless this day in anticipation for the next—their last day to march around the mighty city. In the middle of the camp, in front of the Tabernacle where anyone could approach, though no one dared touch,

the pillar of cloud stood, unwavering. It would be the last night the pillar would travel with the people.

Within moments of stepping outside, dust caked Gideon's legs and particles clung to his long eyelashes. He looked at the neighboring tent where two women stood chatting, both already covered in a fine layer of dust. Seeing him, one of the women turned and walked toward him. Risking sand in his mouth, Gideon spread his lips and gave a smile for his wife, Eva (הַיָּהוּבָה). He called to her, "It's quite the blustery day, isn't it?"

"Yes it is. This morning the children were throwing sand into the air to watch it fly away."

"We must thank Him for the day."

When Eva got to him, Gideon took her in his arms as they continued talking. Her hair flailed violently in the gusts, and she freed one hand to remove it from her face. Gideon told her about that morning, marching around Jericho—just like the days before. He told how they trailed through the dust around the high walls of the city. Gideon spoke softly to his wife, reverently of the week's activities, and he held her firmly.

While he was still speaking, two children ran up to them and pulled on their tunics. The older, his daughter Tam (תָּמָר), and the younger, his son Asher (אַשֶׁר), did not worry themselves with the daily marching around the city; rather, plainer things concerned them. They tugged on their parents' clothes, demanding their attention, as Asher's eyes welled up with tears. Eva noticed the blood on her son's knee and bent down to inspect it. Tam addressed her father:

"We were playing out on those rocks outside of camp, and then one of the elders came by and told us to get down, and so I got down but Asher didn't and I told Asher to get down but he

still didn't, and when the elder called to him again to get down, Asher purposely tried to jump from the rock he was on to another!" She breathed.

Gideon turned to his son, "Asher, is this true?"

"Abba, I'm sorry," he whimpered. "I knew I shouldn't but... I just didn't want to listen to him. I thought I could make it."

Eva stood up and went into the tent to fetch some bandaging. Gideon knelt in her place, his face close to Asher's. He looked at the child, at his handsome, brown hair, and at his cheeks, perpetually red with blush. He looked at his child and said, "My son, we must always listen to those above us; no matter what we think we can do."

"I know. I won't do it again, Abba." Gideon kissed his son's head. The whole camp kept silent as a strong breeze swept through it, and the pillar of cloud in the center stood unwavering.

*"And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.
And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land
which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob,
to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,
And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not,
and wells digged, which thou diggedst not,
vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not;
when thou shalt have eaten and be full;
Then beware lest thou forget the Lord,
which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.
Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him."*

The afternoon was growing old, and most of the men sat around low fires with their families. Some of the men, though, walked around the camp aimlessly, their legs too scared to stay still. A few men stood at the edge of the tents, watching.

Gideon jabbed at the fire in front of him while his wife encouraged the children to finish their dinner. His eyes did not react to the dancing flames; he stared straight forward. He thought about his people. Though he was only a young man, least of the mighty clan of Sered (סֶרֶד) within the tribe of Zebulun (זְבֻלֹן), he cared deeply for his people. His mind was restless, and he continued jabbing the fire.

When Tam had finished her food, she stood up and walked to her father. He snapped out of his daze and took his daughter into his lap. He squeezed her tight and whispered into her ear his love for his little girl. He bounced his leg as he continued prodding the fire.

When they finished eating, Eva began collecting the pot and bowls to go clean in the river. As Asher handed her his bowl, a great trumpet blare filled the whole camp.

Everyone in Israel perked their ears, and the men turned their necks to look toward the center of the camp. Most of them did not move from where they sat. For forty years, the Israelites had trained their ears to distinguish the subtleties of each horn blast—this sounding called for only the leaders of the clans to assemble before the entrance of the holy tabernacle.

Though the men did not move, their minds raced. Tomorrow would be the last day of marching around the city, and they did not know what was then expected of them. The Israelites were a sturdy people, made strong in the wilderness, but battle they had not seen before. All they knew was the might they had seen in Egypt and the law of their religion. They waited anxiously for their clan leaders to return.

When the sun set, before it had disappeared beyond the horizon, the clan leaders dispersed, calling together their respective peoples. The fighting men assembled in their clan groups; they stood ready for the news. Gideon was one of many in the largest clan in his tribe. He stood near the back and listened.

“Men of Sered, I bring important instruction. Our leaders have received a word from above: tomorrow is the day.” The whispering among the men ceased. The leader explained what would happen the next day, that after seven marches around the city of Jericho, all the soldiers were to give a great cry and that then, “We shall storm the city. He will have given it into our hands.”

The men broke out in loud shouts of acclamation. They cheered for the promise that was finally coming to fulfillment, but the leader continued, “He has required of us the blood of the land. We are to show no mercy to the wicked inhabitants of Jericho or any other city we find in Canaan. Leave no man, woman, or child—not even the livestock shall be left alive.” The joy of the men quieted. “Men of Sered, we are of great number in this nation. Much of the battle will rest on our shoulders; fight valiantly tomorrow, men. Serve Him.” And with that, the assembly was dismissed.

*“For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire,
even a jealous God.”*

Gideon stared upward, no light to guide his eyes. The night was too thick for anything to be distinguishable now that the sun was down. Eva slept next to him, his children not far away. The night was silent.

He turned to his wife to make sure she was definitely asleep before sliding out from under the blanket they shared. His eyes were heavy, but sleep would not embrace him—so he left the tent, careful to disturb no one, and entered into the night air. He was the only one out in the camp except the occasional watchman marked by a glowing torch.

His feet leading him more than his mind, Gideon wandered around the campgrounds. His mind churned with thought, general and aimless, not yet deliberation. Everything was distant. He wandered and walked through one, then two, changing of the guards. Tomorrow loomed over his mind.

As he passed between tents, his skin began to feel warm, and despite the time of night, he found the path he walked unnaturally bright. He looked up from his feet to find, still a hundred cubits away, the bright pillar of fire that stood before the holy tabernacle reaching high into the sky. The cloud that guided the Israelites in the day had given way to a mighty, flaming column when the sun had set. Gideon was drawn to it.

When he turned the corner of the tabernacle, to the front entrance where the fire stood, he was cloaked in light. He had never been this close to the fiery pillar before, usually near the back of the Israelite processions or asleep at night. Gideon came nearer. The pillar stood nearly 100 cubits up into the air and half a dozen men could not link arms around it. The flames were feral—like a wildfire—but contained in a single, vertical stream. Power and might radiated from the fiery column, and heat emanated from the pillar—but it was not unbearable. Gideon extended his hand toward the warmth of the pillar of the LORD (יהוה?).

He stood there, close but coming no closer. He could not look away from the holy fire. Veins of fire raced upward and disappeared into the sky only to be replaced at the base of the

pillar. But there was no sound, no crackle. No words came forth from the column. For a moment, Gideon's mind sunk into the silence.

Then a mouse came up by his feet. It was only a small field mouse looking for warmth in the night, but it cast a long shadow between Gideon's feet. Just meaning to shoo it, he shifted his feet and frightened the creature. The mouse sprinted forward from between Gideon's feet. But it came too close to the pillar, and a tongue of fire flicked out and licked up the small animal. Nothing remained, as if it had never been there.

Gideon backed up from the fire and returned to his tent.

*“Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.
If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me,
I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot,
and I will kill you with the sword;
and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.”*

The skin under his eyes hung loose like empty sacks; their faint purple clashed with his pale cheeks. Gideon's joints were stiff from that night, and the sun had yet to rise.

The camp moved quickly this morning, everyone keeping busy with their hands and with their legs. They carried gear from here to there and relayed messages from one to another. Some were only dressing themselves, some had moved on to eating breakfast, and some stood at the edge of the camp, armored and anxious to move. Still, the camp was quiet and no laughing was heard among the sea of tents.

Gideon had finished sipping his porridge and sat by his small fire readying his instruments of war. A knife and spear rest on the ground near him while he worked on his sword.

The bronze blade looked dull in the morning light, but Gideon knew how sharp it was. He had sat in that same place, stoning the blade for nearly an hour already. His countenance was fallen, and grime was beginning to collect under his fingernails.

He finally set down the sword with his other weapons. He peered down at the bronze blades on all three. Slender and serpentine, sharp as fangs, lethal as venom—a crafty blow from these and one would surely die. The men all around camp were carrying these instruments around, wielding them, ready to use them. Though they may have differed from soldier to soldier—a bow for one man, a spear for another—they were all for the same purpose. Gideon began assuming his armor.

Tam, his daughter, was easily awoken by the life in the camp, as young children often are. She slipped out of the tent and found her father preparing for the day. She stood close to him, not needing to say anything at first. She looked around the camp, colored all over by the gray sky. She looked at the faces of each of the men that hurried by, and she looked at the face of her father. A frown spread across her lips, “I don’t like this day.”

When she said this, Gideon snatched her up and held her tight to his chest. His deep eyes looked into hers, unblinking, and the words fled from his daughter’s lips. He told her, “Tam, we must always thank the LORD for the day. Always.” She nodded, quickly. He released the vise of his arms, and his daughter backed slowly from his embrace before turning and hurrying away. Again, he dropped his face and his hands.

Men began lining up all around the camp, preparing to converge and head off to the mighty city of Jericho. They filed into lines with their backs hunched and hands tightly gripping

their weapons. Their cheeks were hollow and their eyes sunken. They looked as if ready to march down into Sheol (שְׁאוֹל). A trumpet blast filled the camp, and they knew it was time to go.

*So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets:
and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet,
and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat,
so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him,
and they took the city.*

*And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city,
both man and woman, young and old,
and ox, and sheep, and ass,
with the edge of the sword.*

The Israelites rushed about, madly slaying any and all they saw. Some men stayed back, launching volleys of arrows into the center of the city where inhabitants were likely to huddle for safety. On the edges, few of the city's soldiers were left, leaving mostly families that had lived close to the walls and avoided the collapse.

Gideon rushed in among the first line of warriors, his sword in one hand, his spear in the other, and his knife strapped to his thigh. He let the patriotism and the anger overwhelm him, the bloodlust of the crowd and the mob mentality guide him. His heart raced as he searched out the deed he must do.

Looking around, he would see a soldier from the city charging forth, but before he could strike, a fellow Israelite would cut down the soldier. A man of Jericho would take up the sword to ward off the invaders but the numbers would overwhelm him. Gideon turned in circles, ready to act, but with no one to act upon. He scoured the rubble of the fallen walls and broken homes, Israelite warriors dashing around him, screams and battle cries filling the air beyond its saturation point.

He searched in vain, and he found nothing—until he came upon a woman. She cowered behind a shattered wall, whimpering. The other Israelites had not noticed her and had rushed by. Gideon approached, and when she saw him she was stricken with fear. Gideon felt her fear, but he dismissed it. He morphed his mind, filling it with rage that he might do what must be done. He swallowed as he raised his spear and took a step forward. But before he could strike, an arrow came from the sky and brought her to the ground with a whistle and a scream. She was dead.

His teeth clenched together and he held in a scream of his own. His knuckles turned white as he squeezed his weapons even tighter. He continued running through the streets, madly searching for a way to accomplish his duty. Everywhere he turned, the deed had been done and Israelites coursed on through the city of Jericho.

And then Gideon saw him—a small boy hiding in a narrow crevice. The shadow of rubble hid him well and no one had seen him; they all rushed by. But Gideon, by providence, had seen him. It was his large, glistening, white eyes that had given him away. Gideon moved closer to the boy, navigating through the Israelite soldiers rushing all about. He came to the boy, and the boy looked up at him. He saw Gideon’s spear in his hand, raised in the air. He said, “I am Yochanan. I am a good boy. I promise I will be good.”

He looked down at Yochanan (יֹחָנָן), at his light brown hair and his rosy cheeks. The boy did not look away from his assailant. Gideon let out a terrible scream, “With the LORD as my judge!” and hurled his spear down.

*“The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering,
and abundant in goodness and truth,
keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,*

*and that will by no means clear the guilty;
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children,
and upon the children's children,
unto the third and to the fourth generation.”*