

ARTICLE

Healing the Wounded to Lead in the Postcolonial Church

Pieter H. J. Labuschagne

Abstract

Amidst continuous calls for decolonization and Africanization in theological reflection on the African continent, this paper looks at the effects of colonialism, its power and the inequalities and vulnerabilities it created, and how, long after the demise of the structures of colonialism, the coloniality¹ of the heart and mind still lingers. As a white South African, of French Huguenot descent, I come from the minority group which dominated non-white citizens during apartheid. I still benefit from this past privilege but the opposite is true for those who suffered under apartheid, who lives with a legacy of inferiority. For decolonization to succeed, the historically wounded should be supported to find their true identity. This article makes use of Exegesis by Story as methodology to describe the journey of the Old Testament judge Gideon, as an example of healing and restoration of the hearts and minds of the oppressed. The research furnishes the church with transformational principles that can be used to come alongside the oppressed, and to facilitating the healing of the wounded to become leaders.

Keywords: Church as agent of change, Coloniality, Wounded, Healers, Leaders, Restoration, Transformation

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- 1 Colonialism is a political system where one nation forcefully rules over another. Coloniality is the inclination of the heart and mind, where colonial sentiments live on – even when the system is abolished. The term coloniality is therefore used in this paper to refer to an inclination of the heart and mind, manifesting as attitudes, ways of knowing, and patterns of living that exist because of colonialism, which is in turn an external system that is forcefully imposed on people by others. Seroto (2018: 3) defines coloniality as a result of how colonizers “undervalued and dehumanised the imagination and mind of indigenous people”. “Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained in books, in the criteria of academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day” (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243).

1 Introduction

Colonialism dominated large parts of the African continent and its people, with the Western way of life being forced down on different African nations. Eventually this political stranglehold of colonialism started to crumble. In South Africa, the first democratic elections were held in 1994, shortly after the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990. This was a watershed moment for South African politics, leaving behind Apartheid and ushering in freedom and democracy. However, the dreams that people had of this new era started to wane and three decades later the call continues for decolonization and Africanization, and to break the stranglehold that the historically privileged still have on the economy. Though colonialism is dead, the lingering coloniality of people's hearts and minds continue. This article calls on the church to intentionally implement godly principles that will heal hurting people and build their self-worth in a wounded world.

In the 2024 national elections in South Africa the African National Congress (ANC) lost their majority rule for the first time in three decades, securing 40.18% of the votes. This comes after a decade of political turmoil, state capture, and corruption. A Government of National Unity (GNU) is now in place consisting of the ANC, their main opposition the Democratic Alliance, and eight other, smaller parties. Though it falls outside the scope of this article, an interesting topic for future research would be how the local political shift in power will affect the coloniality of people's hearts and minds.

2 Materials and Methods

This article makes use of Baird's "Exegesis by Story" as research methodology. It is an integrated, wholistic approach, which includes all three traditional foci of interpretation: the author, the text, and the reader. The method starts with the text, as the primary focus, and then reconstructs and examines the life-story behind the text. Note that the reader's imaging of this world of Scripture is not the work of imagination – the dangers of that kind of exegesis are obvious and well documented. Imaging the world of Scripture requires discipline: a thorough historical-grammatical analysis of the text must be conducted, with the text itself as the anchor point for imaging and understanding. However, exegesis must go one step further and reconstruct the life-story from the surface structure of the text. This back-story is the foreground, the focus of the search for meaning. How did the author and community struggle with circumstances or issues as revealed by the passage, and what was going on when the text was read for the first time by the original audience?

The key to understanding is to live in the story. Imaging the world of the ancient community of faith allows the reader to interact with the author and their context in such a way that it becomes possible to live in it today. This method corresponds with the early church's own exegetical method, which takes seriously the context of author, recipients, text, and readers. Baird's approach should not be confused with narrative theology, which can descend into theological relativism and a denial of objective truth. He simply calls for a deeper understanding of the text; to move beyond the surface structure to the deep structure of the text; to understand the text better. Getting a glimpse of the people behind the text and the challenges that they faced makes the text more personal and easier to connect to modern readers and the challenges that they face.

The world of Scripture is like a city in which not only the ancient community dwelt but in which the community of faith continues to live today. This approach provides a holistic context for exegesis – understanding the process that lies behind the authors' words. This leads to a measure of synchronicity with the author, the recipients, and the text. The more that modern readers become immersed in the story, the better their understanding of the text. The exegeted text and the constructed back-story show how the ancient audience applied the text, or were expected to apply it.

Exegesis by Story makes application part of the process of exegesis as the modern reader understands and experiences the text, dwelling in their world provided by the ancient community of faith with the proper perspective to receive and to use the text. For the community of faith today, to dwell in the world of Scripture and read the text in that context provides several advantages. The first advantage of Exegesis by Story is the holistic context of understanding that it provides: it helps us to understand what lies behind the authors' statements. The second advantage is contemporaneity, to read and understand the text in the spirit of the times, leading to a significant measure of synchronicity with the author, recipients and text. The third advantage is that the exegeted text and the reconstructed life-story show how the ancient audience applied the text, or was expected to apply it, and therefore what effect the message was expected to have on its readers.

3 The Effect of Oppression

This article looks at Gideon, the Old Testament Judge, as a type of the oppressed, and how his circumstances and bad experiences with Israel's oppressors shaped his way of thinking and acting. Gideon's story helps us to consider the effect of the coloniality of one's heart and mind on our capacity and self-belief. Before we turn to Gideon, let us sketch the historical back-story in broad strokes.

Israel entered Canaan under Joshua's leadership after being set free from Egypt and wandering in the desert for 40 years. Joshua's death led to a leadership void and everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judg. 17.6, 21.25).² This was a repetitive cycle. The Israelites sinned against the Lord and turned away from the Lord; the Lord's anger burnt against them and they fell into the hands of their enemies; they called on the Lord and the Lord raised up a Judge to deliver them; this led to a period of peace; until the people became disobedient again. The cycle repeated.

Hence, the Lord appointed and equipped Judges to rescue the Israelites from their enemies. These Judges resonate with folk tales about national heroes that we heard as children. Some desperate situation presented itself and then, as if from nowhere, someone stepped up and saved the day. I always enjoyed these stories because it is part of a boy's DNA to seek adventure and be the hero. Many of the heroes were young people and children, which had an even greater impact on me. The images that I conjured up of these heroes became part of my frame of reference. It formed part of my white, Western perspective on leadership. I assumed that all heroes were powerful and capable.

However, God has a different view of people. The Lord does not measure people by the same standards as we do. In fact, the Bible is saturated with examples of leaders whom God selected, whose selection ran contrary to these "powerful-hero-of-God" expectations. Moses protested when God called him to lead his people from Egypt because he did not consider himself qualified (Exod. 3-4). Nehemiah claimed that he was too young and could not speak (Neh. 1.6). David was not even considered by his father as a candidate to become king – calling him to appear before the prophet as an afterthought. When Jesse's sons were presented to Samuel, he marvelled at their physique. Yet, God did not select any of them, but elected the teenage-shepherd as the next king (1 Sam. 16.11-12). Solomon saw himself as a little child who was incapable of ruling God's people (1 Kgs 3.6-9). Jesus' disciples were ordinary men and women, who did not have the same credentials as the Jewish leaders, and had no special training in the Scriptures (Acts 4.13). It is clear that the Lord does not make selections in the same way that humans do. God does not consider outward appearance but looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16.7).

The same is true of Gideon's call. His selection to serve as Judge seems odd, not just to us but even to himself. The fact that he turned out to be a prominent Judge is not evident in the account of his call. When we encounter him for the first time, he was

2 All Scripture references are from the New Living Translation (NLT).

weak and fearful. In Judges 6, we read that the Midianites had been ruling over Israel for seven years. They were cruel and the Israelites had to hide from them in mountain caves. Neither crops nor animals were safe from their plundering. The people cried out to God for help and the angel that was sent to Gideon found him threshing wheat in a winepress, out of sight of the enemy. The following table summarizes the conversations that ensued between God, the angel and Gideon. Pay close attention to the words of each character.

Character	Gideon’s call to be a Judge	God’s enabling	Reference
Angel	Mighty hero	The Lord is with you	Judg. 6.12
Gideon		If the Lord is with us, why has all of this happened to us? Where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? The Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.	Judg. 6.13
The Lord	Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites	I am sending you!	Judg. 6.14
Gideon	How can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!		Judg. 6.15
The Lord	You will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.	I will be with you.	Judg. 6.16

In the table several themes stand out. First, Gideon is addressed as “mighty hero” and is instructed to go in the strength that he has, and to rescue Israel from their enemies. God adds that Gideon will destroy the Midianites and that it would be as easy as fighting against one man. In addition to this, the Lord is sending Gideon on this mission. Twice it is stated that the Lord is with Gideon. As with the biblical leaders mentioned already, God is not looking at the immediate circumstances. God is looking to the future role that Gideon will play.

Second, Gideon’s response is quite negative. He does not see himself as a hero or believe that he can rescue his people. He points out that his clan is the weakest in his whole tribe, and that he is the least in his family. He doubts the Lord’s presence; and

asks how all these bad things could have happened to them if the Lord was indeed present with them. Gideon did not see any of the miracles that the ancestors talked about. In fact, he believes that it is the Lord who handed them over to the Midianites. Gideon is blinded by despair. All he can see is how dire his circumstances are. The surrounding enemy and the fear that they instilled made their home in Gideon's heart and mind.

Third, in modern terms, we could say that the Israelites were the colonial subjects of Midian. They were demoralized, stripped of all dignity and their land was plundered. People hid in caves and Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress; he was hiding so that his enemies would not confiscate his grain. For seven years they had been subjects of another nation and had been struggling for survival. These circumstances led to tunnel-vision, where survival and the *here-and-now* was all that mattered. The miracles of the past sounded like fables. The protection and presence of God seemed like lies. If the Lord was with them, then why were they in this unbearable position? Gideon heard the angel and the Lord speak but he did not believe their words. In fact, because of Gideon's insecurity and vulnerability it was impossible for him to believe their words. It was not only the Midianite oppression that kept Gideon captive but also the coloniality of his heart and mind. Paying attention to this deep story that lies behind the words of the text, aids modern readers to place themselves in Gideon's shoes. By pausing to ask how such circumstances would have affected us helps to live in Gideon's story and to understand his hesitance and resistance to God's call.

4 Decolonialization and Decoloniality

What we observe in Gideon's life is also true today. Though colonialism, as a political system, ended in most countries, the coloniality of people's hearts and minds still control them. On 14 July 1957 Dr Martin Luther King Jr delivered a sermon entitled *Overcoming an Inferiority Complex*. He pointed out that "segregation generates a feeling of inferiority, that it gives the individuals under the system an inferiority complex ... it's so easy for us to feel that we don't count, that we are not significant, that we are less than. We stand every day before a system which says that to us" (see also Fanon 2021). On South African shores, Steve Biko (1987: 55) challenged blacks to see themselves as more than "appendages to white society". Colonization was not only established by physical force and violence but also by colonizing people's hearts and minds (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1981; Mamdani 1996: 16–18), culture, language and education (Andreas 2012: 5; Dladla 2011: 3; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1981; Mbembe 2016: 36; Nkoane 2006: 62–3).

Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o (1981: 11–12) shares his experience as a child in a colonial school, where English was the language of the colony, and pupils were not allowed to speak Gĩkũyũ near the school. The punishment for speaking Gĩkũyũ was corporal punishment, a monetary fine, or wearing a metal plate around your neck with inscriptions like I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. The opposite was true when one did well in English. You were rewarded with prizes, prestige and applause.

With the above in mind, it is not enough to put an end to oppressive political structures, to hand over control to the oppressed, and to expect them to be able to manage things in the new *status quo*. One also has to deal with the inward coloniality of the heart and mind, the lingering belief by people that they are inferior and not significant and the impression that they are incapable of success. It is here where the church should play an intentional role to heal the wounded to become leaders. It can only happen when people’s hearts are set free from the imprisonment of the past (Cross & Naidoo 2012: 228). Jansen (2009: 5) rightfully refers to this as “bitter knowledge ... how people remember and enact the past”. It is imperative that the church should minister to hearts and minds that were affected by social evils.

5 Empowerment

Gideon challenged the Lord, if it was truly the Lord speaking, to prove it. When Gideon returned with food that he prepared, the angel touched the food and it was consumed in fire and the angel disappeared. Realizing that it was indeed an angel of the Lord, Gideon cried out that he was doomed, because he had seen the Lord’s messenger face-to-face. When the Lord assured him that he would not die, Gideon built an altar for the Lord (Judg. 6.17-23).

This was the first turning point in his life and resulted in him destroying the Baal altar and Asherah pole, as instructed by the Lord. Gideon, the oppressed, initially rejected the claim that the Lord was with him, was empowering him, and wanted to use him (Judg. 6.12, 14, 16). Yet, a personal encounter with the Lord led to bold obedience and performing a dangerous and confrontational act of bravery (Judg. 6.27). What made the difference? Dr King (1957) answered this question in the sermon referred to earlier. “You should go out with the assurance that you belong and that you count and that you are somebody because God loves you.” This is the same truth that transformed Gideon from doubting the Lord’s favour, blessing and power, and how he, Gideon, the least in his family, and from the smallest clan in his tribe, rescued Israel (Judg. 6.13, 15).

Eventually, Gideon went to war with 300 men against the 135,000-strong coalition forces of the enemy. Not only did he and his men challenge them but pursued the survivors and captured them (Judg. 7–8). What a transformation! What made the difference? What should we see in the unwritten story behind the text? What made the difference was Gideon's newfound identity in, and his dependence on, the Lord. When he prepared for war, filled with the Holy Spirit, he consulted the Lord to make sure that he acted in accordance to the Lord's will. The Lord was with Gideon and encouraged him by agreeing to give him the well-known sign of the fleece on the threshing floor (Judg. 6.36-40).

The Lord transformed a man with no self-belief into a bold leader, and a people with no hope into a willing army that marched towards the enemies. The circumstances were still the same. The enemy was still there, but God was changing Gideon's heart and mind. The deep story behind the text is one of despair that is slowly turning into hope and trust. Gradually Gideon started to realize that his real prison was not built by the Midianites but by his own mind and heart.

6 Developing Confidence

In reply to Gideon's request for a sign, he is assured that the Lord would rescue the Israelites and give them victory over their enemy (Judg. 7.7, 9). As an added confirmation, the Lord encouraged Gideon to go down into the enemy's camp during the night. There, Gideon heard a man talk about a dream that he had about Gideon defeating them in battle. Encouraged, he returned and marshalled his troops and the Lord caused confusion in the enemy's camp so that they started to kill one another. Apart from the 120,000 that died in the chaos of that night, another 15,000 fled, were pursued, and captured by Gideon and his men (Judg. 8.10-12).

The Lord's enabling and empowering helped Gideon to escape his own inferiority complex and to discover the capacity that God had given him. Prolonged indoctrination and domination by those in power debilitates people. According to Biko (1987: 86, 152–3, 166), fear led to a paralysis of the African spirit. From a position of white privilege, I was brought up with the belief that the sky is the limit. I can do anything that I set my mind to and this was mostly true because I had access to education, resources, experiences of success, and a life-long validation of my abilities.

For those who suffered under apartheid, the opposite was true. When you are forcefully removed from your home and relocated to live in segregation under horrific conditions, it is hard to have self-belief. When you are subjected to inferior education, healthcare, career opportunities, citizen's rights, and you are told that you are

nothing more than an animal, you start to believe it. It becomes impossible to stand up and take your rightful place in society (Mashau 2018: 1, Naidoo 2019: 171). Apartheid was driven and characterized by fear and Africans had every reason to fear the security forces, which detained and intimidated them (Du Toit 2008: 36).

When change took place in South Africa with the first democratic elections in 1994, many from the white community willingly ceded power to the very people that they previously oppressed. However, the message that accompanied their surrender of power was clear: we hand the country over to you – now govern and make a success of it. Almost three decades later, whites and blacks are equally disillusioned by many failures. “In the emerging ‘rainbow nation’, the need to embrace another view of nature has been disorienting for many” (Johnson 2008: 624).

The white community blames blacks for not trying hard enough, while the blacks blame apartheid. For both sides their argument makes logical sense.

Whites blame blacks for a lack of drive and zeal. They say blacks must “man-up”, stop blaming apartheid, and do something about their situation. From a white vantage point, this is the way one gets things done. Yet, not having experienced oppression themselves, but rather benefitting from white privilege, whites are incapable of imagining how debilitating and destructive a life of oppression can be. They continue to “think white ... believing that whiteness ought to be the norm” (Green, Sonn & Matsebula 2007: 398). It is imperative that the church takes up the challenge to help people to address their whiteness and its power. Mashau (2018: 5) rightly states that “whiteness needs to work through its Christian heritage that is associated with imperialism, conquest and colonialism that fed racism”.

There is also logic in black people blaming apartheid. The system of apartheid dehumanized and indoctrinated people to believe that they were inferior and incapable; something that has a stronghold on people’s minds and hearts. When you are thrown into the deep end and have never been taught to swim, are your oppressors not to blame when you sink and drown? Mason says “we harbour inside ourselves the pain and the memories, the fears and the confusions, the negative self-images and the low expectations, turning them into weapons with which to re-injure ourselves, every day of our lives” (1990: 69). “The psychological effects which were caused by the Apartheid system had a terrible impact upon black people. They resulted in black people doubting their humanness and doubting whether the God that was presented to them by missionaries and ministers of religion was their God” (Lephakga 2012: 70).

The polarity of referring to “us” and “them” when we talk about other people does not support the move towards a more inclusive society. Elsewhere I have written:

The schism between Africa and the West feeds on the reciprocal prejudice, propaganda and historical injustices, which is not a fertile ground for dialogue and collaboration ... Imperialists want to maintain the status quo – what can be more right than your own epistemology? That is also why the oppressed resist colonialism – what can be more wrong than another’s epistemology being forced upon you? (Labuschagne 2022: 248-9)

Gideon’s story ends with approximately 40 years of peace (Judg. 8.28). His journey has come full-circle, from seeing himself as worthless when the Lord called him, to leading his people to victory over the enemy, and experiencing a time of peace. This means change is possible. The Lord, and the church as God’s agents, can make a difference in people’s self-belief and help them to see themselves for whom they really are. Victims of social abuse can become restorers of social justice and the wounded can become the healer. Joel 3.10 looked forward to the day of the Lord, where even the weakling would become a warrior. Gideon, the hero of our story, was a mighty hero all along. He just had to discover it and believe it for himself. The angel of the Lord called him a hero when they met, because the Lord sees beyond our limitations. God sees our potential and we should do the same.

At the beginning of this article I pointed out my disillusionment at God’s selection of “unqualified” biblical leaders and how they even doubted themselves. Yet, when we follow their stories, they all succeeded in their leadership roles, all the way from Moses, Nehemiah, David, Solomon, to Jesus’ disciples. It is valuable, therefore, to ask what the church should learn from the example of Gideon, and how the church could make a meaningful contribution in helping people to find their true identity in Christ.

7 Results: From Victim to Victor

Several principles from Gideon’s life should be consideration by the church, in healing victims of colonial oppression.

The deep story behind the text is that Gideon and his fellow Jews suffered under the Midianites, who were so cruel that the people had to hide in caves. The enemy constantly attacked them and stayed in the land until all the crops were destroyed and no animals were left. The enemy was so overpowering that they were like waves of locusts, too many to count. Nobody can deny the devastation of the situation, given the Israelites were starving (Judg. 6.2-6). Normalcy did not exist. People were scattered and hiding in mountain crevices. All economic activities ceased. Families

were separated, life-savings destroyed, properties demolished, cultural habits and practices violated.

Gideon and his people were hopeless and lacked confidence. In Judg. 6.13 Gideon conversed with the angel and asked why the Israelites were suffering if the Lord was with them. Gideon heard about the miracles of the past, but in his dire circumstances it was hard to believe any of that. Yes, the Lord might have brought them out of Egypt but now God had abandoned them and handed them over to the Midianites. In Judg. 6.15 Gideon expanded on his lament by stating that he was a nobody, from the weakest clan in the tribe of Manasseh, and that he was the least in his family. Was this true? Or was it the kind of exaggeration that often accompanies depression and despair?

The angel and the Lord did not rebuke Gideon for his outbursts. They allowed him to speak and even to challenge the Lord's goodness and faithfulness to Israel. Yet, despite this outburst, the Lord did not compromise on the mission. Gideon was chosen to set the people free from their enemies. Nowhere in the account of Gideon did the Lord ever verbally challenge Gideon's outburst. God simply encouraged him through a series of signs and faith experiences.

These are important principles to consider. Gideon was blinded by his circumstances but the Lord saw future peace for Israel. God announced a plan and took Gideon along on the journey. From being nobody (in his own eyes) Gideon soon became *Jerub-Baal*, which means "Let Baal defend himself" (NLT). The scared fugitive that we met a few verses earlier, now became a Baal-slayer (Judg. 6.27-32). Subsequently, when Israel's enemies assembled and camped in the valley of Jezreel, a new Gideon emerged. Where he was hiding in a winepress 30 verses earlier, he now acted bravely, "the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon with power. He blew a ram's horn as a call to arms" (Judg. 6.34). Gideon's previous, cynical attitude made way for a bold display of power. The Lord did not persuade Gideon with words, but allowed him to experience the Lord and to see the Lord at work with his own eyes. That made all the difference.

The Church must learn from Gideon's encounter with the Lord that our efforts to bring restoration and healing must not be limited to talking and writing about it. We need to remember that "the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power" (1 Cor. 4.20). The church should contribute what the world does not have, empowered by the enabling of the Lord. The Church consists of those called by God into God's Kingdom. The Church is where people are healed and grow and minister as part for the body of Christ. In Rom. 12.2 Paul urges us not to "copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by

changing the way you think". Talking is not enough – the church should bring lasting change and reconciliation through lived experiences with God. The backstory must change. People must experience God's ways. This has five concluding implications.

First, we met Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress – far from the prying eyes of his enemy. He was negative and scoffed at God's call to rescue his people. His circumstances and his oppressors did not allow any space for a positive self-image. They wanted the Israelites to know who was in charge, and robbed them of their identity, self-belief and courage. The threat of the enemy was as much an external reality as it was an internal one. The Israelites were not only hiding from their enemies; they forgot who they were. Shifting our focus to the oppression by the West, Ngũgĩ points out that language has a dual character – it is a means of communication and a carrier of culture (1981: 13). Forcing Africans to speak English, separated them from themselves, their words and their world. Ngũgĩ adds that language "is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (15). Language carries culture and is therefore inseparable from people and the community they belong to (16). By forcing them to use the colonial language learning, "for a colonial child, became a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience" (17). In embracing his own culture, Ngũgĩ eventually abandoned English, and only wrote in Gĩkũyũ. It is important for the church to contribute to the change that is needed in the world. Social injustice is something that should be dealt with in the church, especially in churches where the previous colonial influences are evident in the liturgy, polity, and language. Space should be created for church members to feel safe enough to exit the winepress, like Gideon, and to experience faith in ways that resonate with their own culture and background. It took Gideon a long time to get from the winepress to the battlefield but the rewriting of his narrative by the Lord and the angel messenger is what led Gideon on his way.

Second, neither the angel nor the Lord rebuked Gideon for his attitude; they simply continued to share their plan with Gideon. The Lord knew that Gideon needed time and encouragement to believe about himself what the Lord already knew. Sometimes Gideon asked for a sign, and sometimes God took the initiative in providing a sign. Initially Gideon had a negative attitude and he did not have any self-belief, as a consequence of his circumstances. The Lord, however, had a plan and saw in Gideon a person who could fulfil that plan. To succeed, Gideon had to get up, stand firm, and live up to what God was asking from him. The church should help believers to associate with such truths, because God is always at work in transforming people into God's likeness and into useful vessels. Instead of talking to people about their desperate context, or judging them for the debilitating effect it has on them, the church should model faith, speak the truth, and encourage belief. Fixing people's eyes on the Lord and on his purposes, sets people free from the prison of their past.

Third, what the Lord said about the biblical leaders mentioned in this paper was the opposite of what they believed about themselves. Yet, this is what made them dependent on the Lord. These leaders could not succeed without God. The church should help people to look beyond their lack of faith or belief in what we can do for God. Further, the church should help people to experience God's call and to be challenged like never before. Those who are reduced to the lower rungs of society, those who have no self-belief, those who are oppressed and mistreated can be healed and become successful leaders.

Fourth, Gideon, the one hiding in a winepress, became Gideon, the leader of an army. From hiding, to calling people publicly to war, was a complete transformation. Note what this transformation in Gideon's life accomplished. It gave courage to his people and they came out of hiding to follow him. The Lord is Lord of the underdog. The Lord uses those we do not consider worthy so that God's power can shine through and that all can see what God is capable of.

Fifth, Gideon saw no way out of his situation. He had not seen the great exploits of the Lord that his ancestors referred to. He believed that they were in this difficult situation because of God and he did not see how a nobody, like himself, could be of any use to his people. He had obstacles that kept him from obedience. These included the fact the enemy was strong and outnumbered them, he was from a small clan, had no physical strength and his own father was worshipping Baal. While these physical barriers incapacitated Gideon, what was rooted much deeper in his heart and mind, was his own coloniality, the belief that he was useless. It was only when the Lord started to rewrite his narrative, that Gideon gained confidence and obeyed the call of God. If God had not reached out to Gideon, he would have remained in the winepress, imprisoned by his own heart and mind. The church should stand against the physical and psychological barriers which remain after decades of colonial oppression. If the church does not reach out to those incapacitated by their own coloniality, and paint a godly picture of life for them, they will remain imprisoned. The church should echo the Lord's words to Gideon: "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!" (Judg. 6.12).

About the Author

Pieter H. J. Labuschagne serves as the Head of Course Development at the South African Theological Seminary and is the pastor of Northway Baptist Church in Pretoria, South Africa. With over 20 years of experience as a missionary, his research interests encompass missiology, contextual studies, hermeneutics, and ecclesiology. Contact: Pieter@sats.ac.za

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