



## Gideon: the Judge Who Needed Reassurance Judges 6

### Introduction

Have you ever sensed that God was telling you to do something? Perhaps you felt Him calling you to do something unusual, bold, or courageous. What has been your reaction? Has it been fear, doubt, or disbelief? Gideon was a man who was called to destroy an idol that was odious to God, but dear to his father and his neighbors. Gideon knew he would risk everything, including his life, to do the right thing. He was afraid, yet he did it anyway.

In Gideon's time the people had settled for compromise too long. Due to their oppressive fear, it took a dramatic event for them to break free from the chains. Where have you compromised? Have you brought some things displeasing to God into your home in order to blend in with your friends and neighbors? What about your attitudes toward your work or spouse? Have they become like those of the people in the world around you?

Even if you have tolerated sinful activities, attitudes, or actions in your family or neighborhood for years, there is hope. Perhaps you have disliked the sin, but you have felt unable or unwilling to take a stand. Perhaps you have tried in the past to eradicate these things, but without success. And so, like the people of Israel, you have stopped trying and have just coped in the best way you could.

The people in your Bible study are there to pray for you and encourage you. Perhaps one of them has experienced "overthrowing an idol" in his/her home. If not, find other mature Christians who have been in your situation and can share their stories. The Lord is powerful to show you a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). Begin to pray and keep your heart and ears open.

### Outline of Judges Chapter 6

- I. Cycle Five - Judges 6:1-10
- II. Call of Gideon - Judges 6:11-24
- III. Clash with Baal and His Followers - Judges 6:25-35
- IV. Confrontation with Doubt - Judges 6:36-40

### I. Cycle Five- Judges 6:1-10

#### A. Midianite Oppression – Judges 6:1-6

##### 1. Israel's Evil Practices

*The Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian.*

After a while, due to their earlier disobedience and intermarriage, the people again turned to things God calls evil. These are practices which weaken character and bring disease to individuals and societies. God cannot condone destructive ways. He is offended by them and must take action against them. One way God acts is to lift His hand of protection and allow other nations, or circumstances, as a punishment for the purpose of correction.

#### 2. Midian's seven-year rule

The Midianites were an indigenous desert people, also referred to in Scripture as Ishmaelites. Joseph was sold to Midianites (Genesis 37:28). Moses shepherded among the Midianites and married a Midianite woman (Exodus 3:1). The Midianites had been living in a non-threatening way beside Israel. But as Israel acted sinfully, the Midianites began to develop superior strength in terms of numbers and camels. They began to dominate the tribe of Manasseh in increasingly harsh ways, and a weakened Israel was unable to resist.

Are you weakened by some evil practice so that you are unable to resist and overcome influences that oppress or depress you? Forsake such ways, or people. Ask God's forgiveness and help. Take the strength He supplies through prayer and the study of His word so you may adopt spiritual, healthy habits.

##### a. Hiding in caves

The Israelites were so overwhelmed by the ferocious Midianites that they hid in caves, driven up into the mountains and huddled together in strongholds, trying to grow whatever food they could to survive.

Do you find yourself retreating from life's realities into drugs, alcoholic beverages, illicit affairs? Or maybe your escape is the TV, partying, superfluous shopping, or aimless activities? How much better to talk to a friend about the Lord, write a letter of appreciation to someone, read a good book, babysit for a busy mother, or offer to drive an elderly person somewhere.

##### b. Losing their crops

Not satisfied to raid the children of Israel occasionally, the Midianites timed their invasions to coincide with planting and harvest seasons. Their herds and people were so numerous that they did catastrophic damage to the fields.

### B. The People Cried Out to God – Judges 6:7

Finally, after forty years, the people were so exhausted and impoverished they cried out to God. Why do you think they waited so long? Could they have been feeling too guilty, or had they forgotten about God? Today we know, *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

### C. Prophet Sent by God – Judges 6:8-10

This unnamed prophet recited the cycle for the people, emphasizing God's commitment to them as a nation, their divine rescue from Egypt, and God's provision for them. Notice that he also reminded them that God had specifically told them not to fear the gods of the Amorites.

The verdict was that they had not obeyed God's voice.

## II. Call of Gideon - Judges 6:11-24

### A. The Call – Judges 6:11-12

#### 1. The Angel of the Lord

The Angel appeared to Gideon under a sacred tree ("terebinth" was considered a sacred oak tree (See Unger's Bible Dictionary, Merrill F. Unger). The Angel called him *mighty man of valor*. It is clear from the passages above that for many years prior, neither Gideon nor anyone in his whole village could be called mighty! The key lies in the statement, *The Lord is with you*, which gave Gideon a strength and power far beyond any personal ability.

The angel in these verses is identified not as "an" angel of the Lord, but "the" Angel of the Lord. Clearly, this is the Lord, Himself. See Judges 6:14 where this is revealed. The Hebrew word for angel is "malak" and means, "messenger". The created angels are God's messengers. In addition, God sent many messengers to His people in the form of prophets. But the ultimate messenger is the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. "The" Angel of the Lord may thus be identified as a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. This is known as a theophany, which means "an appearance of God". Other notable theophanies are found in Genesis 16, Genesis 22, Exodus 3, Numbers 22, and Judges 13.

#### 2. Gideon the fearful

The fact that Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress suggests either that the villagers believed the Midianites or their spies were nearby, or simply that Gideon was excessively fearful. We know little of Gideon's personal

faith or personality at this point, only that he was the son of a prominent Baal worshipper (6:25) and that he was the "least" in the family.

### B. Gideon's Questions – Judges 6:13-16

#### 1. *If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened?*

From Gideon's point of view, God had abandoned His people. But this "man" sitting under a tree on his property had said, *The Lord is with you*. Gideon may have felt mocked as he threshed his wheat in secret, or he may have been attempting to correct this visitor, so the question he asked was legitimate. It may be a question you have asked before in times of trouble. Have you ever felt mocked as a child of God for not being wise, strong, or successful? Or what about times when you have tried so hard to do the right thing and it ended in catastrophe? Have you berated yourself and doubted God? God's message to you today is, *The Lord is with you*.

Notice that the angel did not hold this question against Gideon. Compare this to the angel who struck Zechariah mute after he asked a question (Luke 1:11-20). There are some important differences however. In Luke's gospel, Zechariah was a devout priest. He instantly recognized his visitor as a supernatural being (he was troubled and fear fell upon him), but still he questioned the power of God.

#### 2. How can one insignificant person save a nation?

Note the Lord's statement, *Go in this might of yours and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites*. Clearly Gideon knew he did not have the strength to save his family, much less his entire country, in the face of the Midianites. Also, he wondered who would follow him into battle. He was nothing but a country peasant from a small clan.

And the Lord said to him, *Surely I will be with you and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man* (6:16). Gideon suddenly realized that this visitor had said something astonishing! He claimed to be the Lord God of Israel!

### C. The Test – Judges 6:17-21

Gideon was still not sure. All this time he had believed that God had abandoned his people, and now he was faced with one who spoke as God. Gideon did the only thing he knew to do, he asked for proof.

The Lord agreed. When Gideon presented his offering, it went up in flame, the Angel disappeared, and Gideon was terrified. For the first time, he realized he was dealing

with the Almighty God, the God of Israel. He was sure he was going to die. (See Genesis 32:30).

#### D. The Acknowledgement – Judges 6:22-24

Gideon was reassured that he would not die, and he built an altar to the Lord.

### III. Clash with Baal and His Followers - Judges 6:25-35

#### A. Pulling Down the Altar of Baal – Judges 6:25-28

##### 1. The sacrifice

The Lord told Gideon to sacrifice his father's *second bull of seven years old*. It is unclear what the significance of the second bull was, but some Bible scholars believe that this bull was one kept for sacrificial purposes.

It is interesting to note how the Lord used pagan things to His own purposes and in doing so, sanctified them. Suddenly the bull for Baal became an appropriate sacrifice for Almighty God and the wooden image became the site of an holy altar that was special for hundreds of years.

##### 2. The altar

The Lord told Gideon to tear down his father's altar. Judging from the villagers' reaction in later verses, it may be fair to assume that this altar was either the most important or the largest in the region. The fact that it was Joash's may indicate that Gideon was a son in one of the more important families in the area.

The Asherah pole was probably a statue of the goddess of war and fertility, Ashtoreth. It is interesting to note that she had been unsuccessful in giving them either food during this famine or courage in war.

We often look to impotent gods to help us, gods such as money, status, "looking good", hard work, drugs, alcohol, fame, popularity, education, and on and on. While at first these seem to help in life in the spiritual realm, they are worthless and misleading.

##### 3. The fear

Gideon was afraid of what others would think, but he obeyed. That was the most important thing.

#### B. Protected by His Father – Judges 6:29-32

Why did Joash protect his son, even after Gideon had taken his best bull and knocked over his gods? It seems that he truly loved his son. Perhaps he knew in his heart

that Gideon was right. Joash's name means "The Lord (Yahweh) has given". It is possible that his parents were God-fearing people who taught him well, but that Joash had added pagan gods to his belief system.

#### C. Midianites Move In – Judges 6:33

Three of Israel's enemies joined together to invade the land. They crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) from Ophrah. Imagine the skepticism of the children of Israel when Gideon, a mere farm boy, told them he would lead the people in a fight against the Midianites. This may have been the first time in seven years that anyone had stood up to the oppressors.

#### D. Rallying the People – Judges 6:34-35

*The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.* This is a rare and incredible experience in the Old Testament. It seems to be the direct power and authority of God acting through a human being. This authority given to Gideon may have been what attracted an army of 32,000 when he *blew the trumpet* (Judges 7:3-4).

Today, since the coming of Jesus and the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), we can have this Spirit living inside us continually (Romans 8:11, James 4:5). Although the Spirit has tremendous power and dwells within, we may sometimes feel powerless. Perhaps we do not take the time to listen to the Spirit and we fear what might happen if we do.

### IV. Confrontation with Doubt - Judges 6:36-40

#### A. First Test: Dry Ground, Wet Fleece – Judges 6:36-38

On the eve of Gideon's attack, he may have begun to have cold feet. He was, after all, just a farmer, not a military man, and he knew how terrible the Midianites were. Surely it would be much simpler just to hide again. Instead of giving into his fears, he asked God for another proof, which God allowed.

#### B. Second Test: Wet Ground, Dry Fleece – Judges 6:39-40

Why would Gideon ask for a second proof? Was he stalling, or playing games with God? One Bible commentator, F.F. Bruce, suggests that after an evening dew it might be normal for the rock floor of the threshing room to be dry and the fleece wet, "[However] the reverse result would be truly remarkable." Maybe Gideon was very humble, almost too embarrassed to make his request, but God graciously complied without reproach.

**Applications**

1. Do you ever get cold feet, too paralyzed with fear to do what you know is right? God is patient. He wants you to obey and will give you every reasonable reassurance. But God also knows our hearts and knows if we are being deliberately disobedient. Gideon is a good example of what to do with fear. Go to God with it. Compare this with some ways other leaders in Scripture, both good and bad, dealt with fear by running, compromising, or giving up.

2. Do you think it is too late to obey and trust God? Perhaps you feel that you have disobeyed God in the past and can never be right with Him again. This is not true. God forgives and wants you to go on. He

is not holding confessed sins for which Christ died, against you, even though you may be experiencing the consequences of making a wrong choice.

3. What action does God want you to take? Are there “idols” in your home that are loved and cherished by family members? If thinking about this alarms you, and you envision God calling you to do something very bold, or unusual, or controversial, be sure it is God telling you this and not your own will or imagination.

It has been said, “God speaks perfectly, but we do not listen perfectly.” To determine God’s will, pray with other strong Christians, read His Word, and keep your heart open.