

The Judges: Gideon Defeats the Midianites

Review: Rollercoaster Religion and Casserole Creeds

Last week we looked at both the eclectic and cyclical nature of Israel's behavior during the time of the judges. **Judges 2:16-19** summarizes the pattern that we will see repeatedly in **Judges: 16 Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges** [judges, governors, vindicators, punishers, **heroic** leaders] **who delivered** [saved, delivered, gave victory to] **them out of the hand of those who plundered them. 17 Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot** [explicit unfaithfulness] **with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so. 18 And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. 19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.**

Preview: How Can I Be Sure?

In today's lesson, we meet Gideon—an initially reluctant hero. Gideon is famous for his request for **signs** from God to confirm God's message (some things never change). Gideon is like the Colombo of the Old Testament judges—constantly asking God questions and wanting one more thing from Him. The real hero of the story of Gideon, though, is (as usual) God. His generous mercy, His unrelenting love, and His beautiful longsuffering steal the show in this passage.

Key thought: Even though He uses men to accomplish His purpose, **God** is the hero of the Bible

Read & Explain (What does it mean?): Judges 6-7 (Author = Samuel?)

Judges 6

Midianites Oppress Israel

1 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered [gave, put, set] **them into the hand of Midian for seven years, 2 and the hand of Midian prevailed** [was strong] **against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. 3 So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. 4 Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. 5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy** [spoil, ruin, morally pervert, corrupt] **it. 6 So Israel was greatly impoverished** [laid low—the opposite being high and proud (the implication is that they were **humbled**)] **because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD** [David Guzik: Even through Israel cried

out to the Lord, they didn't really know that *they* were the problem. Crying out to God for help does not always mean we have recognized our sin or repented.].

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD because of the Midianites, **8** that the LORD sent a prophet [Who was this prophet? Are you willing to go unaccredited in God's big, beautiful plan of redemption?] to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; **9** and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. **10** Also I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.'" [Notice how an unnamed prophet shows up in the period of the judges. Note: while academics and teachers attempt to draw clean lines between the periods of the patriarchs, the judges, the kings, and the prophets, the line is actually very fuzzy.]

Gideon

11 Now the Angel of the LORD [Jesus—this is another theophany (an Old Testament appearance of Jesus)] came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite [one of Manasseh's sons—firmly Jewish], while his son Gideon [hewer—meaning one who cuts things down] threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites [Picture this scene in your mind and ask, "Does this look like a hero?"]. **12** And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty [strong] man of valor [literally, 'you strong army man'; I love how God believes in us before we believe in ourselves—perspective will do that]!"

13 Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? [Question/request #1] And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' [Question/request #2] But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites [Who really had forsaken whom?]."

14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you? [This question implies Gideon has been previously called and has not yet risen to the occasion—similar to the account of Deborah and Barak last week]"

15 So he [Gideon] said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? [Question/request #3] Indeed my clan [family; literally, it means, 'mine (of the thousands of families)'] is the weakest in Manasseh [tribe], and I am the least in my father's house." [These objections remind me of Moses' objections to the Angel of the Lord back in Exodus]

16 And the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you [this sounds like God's response to Moses—God is wholly and completely consistent], and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

17 Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign [sign, signal, token, ensign, standard, miracle, proof; God's Word is proof enough] that it is You who talk with me [Question/request #4]. **18** Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You [Question/request #5]."

And He said, "I will wait until you come back."

19 So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought *them* out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented *them*. **20** The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay *them* on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so [finally, obedience without question!].

21 Then the Angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that *was* in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. [Boom—there is your proof!]

22 Now Gideon perceived that He *was* the Angel of the LORD [Ya' think?]. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face."

23 Then the LORD said to him, "Peace *be* with you; do not fear, you shall not die." [Remember that most people's first reaction to seeing either an angel or God in the Old Testament is extreme fear. Gideon did not experience that fear first—he experienced that last, so now he needs the encouragement not to fear.] **24** So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it The-LORD-*Is*-Peace. To this day [the day that **Judges** was written] it *is* still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

25 Now it came to pass the same night that the LORD said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image [many altars erected to false gods had sacred trees that were nearby that had inscriptions in them] that *is* beside it; **26** and build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down." [I think Gideon wanted to test God. I also think God wanted to test Gideon. God tells Gideon to throw out the **casserole**. This is a beautiful example of the 'put-off-put-on' principle taught in **Ephesians 4:20-24**] **27** So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the LORD had said to him [no questions]. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do *it* by day, he did *it* by night [not yet heroic, but obedient nonetheless].

Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal

28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that *was* beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar *which had been* built. **29** So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing." [How did they know this?] **30** Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that *was* beside it."

31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down! [Finally, a wise perspective about gods]" **32** Therefore on that

day he called him [Gideon] Jerubbaal, saying, “Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar.”

33 Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. **34** But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon [this is key—when the man of God is filled with the Spirit of God and intends to do the will of God]; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. **35** And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali [other tribes in Israel]; and they came up to meet them [Gideon is looking more and more like a hero. Small steps of obedience will **strengthen** your faith.].

The Sign of the Fleece

36 So Gideon said to God, “If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said— **37** look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is dry* on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.” [Question/request #6] **38** And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. **39** Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more [Colombo behavior—Gideon had previously told God that the first test would be enough, but Gideon went back on his word]: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.” [Question/request #7] **40** And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground. [God responded to all seven of Gideon’s questions/requests. This is the last thing Gideon asked of God.]

Judges 7

Gideon’s Valiant Three Hundred

1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who *were* with him [we find out in a minute that 32,000 men came] rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites [we know from **Judges 8** that there were 135,000 enemies present] was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

2 And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people who *are* with you *are* too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ **3** Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever *is* fearful and afraid [trembling], let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.’” And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained [69% of those that came went home].

4 But the LORD said to Gideon, “The people *are* still *too* many [Sometimes God’s mathematical analysis does not make sense to us]; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, *that* of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ the same shall not go.” **5** So he brought the people down to the water [obedience without question]. And the LORD said to Gideon, “Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink.” **6** And the number of those who lapped, *putting* their hand to

their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. [Confession time: I would have put my hand to my mouth—what does that tell you about these men?] **7** Then the LORD said to Gideon, “By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you [God did not use the 99%, He used the 1%], and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the *other* people go, every man to his place.” **8** So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all *the rest of* Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

9 It happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. **10** But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah [bough—like a branch] your servant, **11** and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.” Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who *were* in the camp [meaning Gideon was still **afraid**]. **12** Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude. [Camels were important because camels allowed the soldiers to travel quickly across the battlefield and Israel had no camels]

13 And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, “I have had a dream: *To my surprise*, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed.”

14 Then his companion answered and said, “*This is* nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp.” [David Guzik: Barley bread was the bread of the very poor; the vision means that the camp of the Midianites will be knocked over by a humble nobody]

15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, “Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.” **16** Then he divided the three hundred men *into* three companies, and he put a trumpet [a ram’s horn—I personally would have preferred a sword or a shield or a spear] into every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. **17** And he said to them, “Look at me and do likewise [this is 100% pure **leadership**—do what I do]; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: **18** When I blow the trumpet, I and all who *are* with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, ‘*The sword of* the LORD and of Gideon!’” [Psalm 20:7: Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God. David Guzik: There is no specific mention that God gave Gideon this plan through supernatural revelation. Yet, because Gideon is a Spirit-filled man (Judges 6:34), the supernatural can operate very naturally in his life.]

19 So Gideon and the hundred men who *were* with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that *were* in their hands. **20** Then the three companies blew the trumpets and

broke the pitchers—they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing—and they cried, “The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!” **21** And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. **22** When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man’s sword against his companion throughout the whole camp [God caused Israel’s enemies to **fight** themselves]; and the army fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath.

23 And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites.

24 Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan.” Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. **25** And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan. [David Guzik: God did the great work through this small number of men; but once the great work had begun, He wanted as many as who could to get involved in the work]

The rest of the story is that Gideon pursues the remainder of Israel’s enemies 150 miles and kills them all too.

Apply (What is the point?)

1. God can handle all of your **questions**, but at the end of the day, He wants your obedience
2. God can handle all of your **fears**, but at the end of the day, He wants your obedience
3. God is the real hero and will use whatever is in your **hand** to fulfill His purposes

Personalize (What do I do with that?)

1. Question, but obey
2. Fear, but obey
3. Use what is in your hand for God