

Gideon

Judges 6:1-40, Judges 7:1-25

Slide 1

Today, we're studying Gideon, a man who started out weak but, by the end of the story, was strong. His story takes place in the book of Judges.

As a reminder, when we talk about the book of Judges, we are not talking about people who sat in a court of law and oversaw court proceedings.

During Biblical times, Judges were like military leaders. Generals who protected the people and their property.

Also, when you read the book of Judges, you'll discover a pattern. God's people do evil in the eyes of the Lord, then God allows an oppressor, usually a foreign enemy, to come and put a heavy hand on the people.

After a certain period of time, the people would get frustrated and cry out to the Lord for deliverance.

Then God would send a deliverer, somebody to deal with what was going on in that particular situation. That deliverer was known as a judge.

This is the pattern that Israel followed most of her life. So, in today's passage, starting in chapter 6, the end of such a cycle is in progress.

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The Israelites had done evil in the eyes of the Lord, therefore, for seven years God had given them into the hands of the Midianites for punishment.

Now, the Midianites were a group of people we don't know much about other than they occupied what we know today as Arabia.

They were nomads who traveled throughout the desert regions with their camels, tents, and caravans. They were also known to be fierce when they attacked.

At this particular time, they were the enemies of Israel. As Israel began to plant and grow their crops, the Midianites would come across the River Jordan, consume all the crops and kill their animals.

Wreaking a path of destruction in their wake, they were like a swarm of locusts consuming everything in their path.

The Midianites impoverished the Israelites so much that they cried out to the Lord for help. It's in this particular setting that we're introduced to Gideon.

Like Samson, who was introduced by an angel that came and visited Samson's mother before he was born, Gideon is introduced to us by an angel, but in a different setting.

Judges 6:11, *"The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah [O-fra] that belonged to Joash the A-bee-ez-rite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites."*

Let me stop here and explain a few things. The reader of ancient times would read this and say something's not right.

Even modern-day readers, if they're reading with observing eyes, would say, *"Why's Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress?"*

Now, I didn't know the difference between a winepress and a threshing place, so I looked it up and found some images that clarified what Gideon was doing.

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The threshing of wheat usually took place outside. This is a picture of what usually happens when threshing wheat.

On the left side you have some oxen that would be trembling or walking over the wheat stalks trying to separate the grain from the husks.

On the other side you have men using winnowing forks that would throw the stuff up in the air and the grains would fall and separate from the husks.

Someone would come along, scoop up the threshed wheat, and toss it in the so the wind could blow away the husks. The main point is that threshing occurred on the outside in the open.

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In this next slide are three pictures of ancient winepresses.

People would pull the grapes off the vine, take them to the press, where they would either stomp on them or use a large stone wheel to mash the juice out of them, after which somebody would gather it into a jar.

The key thing to remember is that the pressing of the wine happened below ground or in an enclosed environment.

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This is the situation when the angel appears. He appears to a frightened Gideon who's hiding in an enclosed place called a winepress instead of outside because he was fearful of the Midianites.

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Judges 6:12, *“When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, ‘The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.’”*

The angel didn't go up to Gideon and say, *“The Lord is with you, you coward,”* since he was hiding in a winepress. No, he says, *“The LORD is with you, mighty warrior,”* which Gideon ignores.

Instead of being amazed by the appearance of an angel, in verse 13 he starts complaining.

He says, *“If the Lord is really with me, if the Lord is really with us, if the Lord is really with our people, then why are these bad things happening to us.”*

Where are the miracles that our fathers told us about like when God delivered the Hebrew people from the Egyptians and led them cross the Red Sea and that sort of thing? Where are those miracles today?”

Now, Gideon wasn't asking a bad question. It's the same question we'd probably ask if we were in the midst of some sort of oppression, or some sort of economic or moral problem, or violence, *“Where's God when I need Him?”*

Even today, as we look at the chaos our country is in, we can't be faulted for thinking, *“Has God abandoned us?”*

But, if you think about it, the question shouldn't be, *“Has God abandoned us?”* rather *“Have we, as a country, abandoned God?”* I think that's closer to the truth.

The reality is God's right here. He hasn't left us; we've left Him. God's always here, in the good times and in the bad times.

In fact, I think He's here more in the bad times because that's where He's able to demonstrate His glory and power.

It's in the bad times that He comes and sends deliverers to free the people from their oppressed state. He could be getting ready to do that today or maybe we haven't hit rock bottom yet.

Thinking about that, contrary to what some would say, when God does come to deliver us, I don't think He's going to dump a carload full of money on us and deal with all our health issues.

I know He can do that. He can fix our material things. He can give us health. But what we know about God, through scripture, is that He's more serious about healing our hearts than our bank account or our health.

He wants to heal the inner man and the inner woman. He wants to deal with the stuff that's going on inside us that needs to be fixed for us to truly take on His image.

Not only that, but He's also trying to develop our faith. He's trying to develop a faith that'll sustain us through the best of times and the worst of times.

When we have that faith, when we're able to demonstrate to the world that no matter how bad it gets, we're not turning away from God, people begin to take notice.

As the world around us asks, *"How can you continue to have faith in spite of your troubles?"* they'll begin to be drawn to Jesus.

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Let's get back to the story. Rather than answering Gideon's question, the angel tells him in verse 14, *"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"*

What does Gideon do? He immediately begins to make excuses. I'm part of the least of Israel's tribes and not only that, I'm the least of the tribe.

Judges 6:15, *"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."*

In other words, Gideon's whining about have a low standing in society, so how could he be used in some sort of mighty way? Again, it's the same reasoning we use on ourselves or others when God's directing us down a certain path.

How can God use me? I don't have the education. I don't have the appearance. I don't have the smarts. I don't have the wealth. I come from a dysfunctional family.

Whatever it is, we make thousands of excuses where we continually say, *"God can never use me."*

Romans 4:17 tells us that God sees the things that are not as though they are. Just as God saw Gideon as a mighty warrior, He sees all of us as mighty warriors.

1 Corinthians says, *"God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."* That's how He operates. He does it so His glory is manifested in a mighty way through the weak, not through the strong.

Gideon still doesn't quite understand He's talking to an angel of the Lord, but he began to sense that maybe he's the real deal.

He basically says, *"If God is really showing his favor upon me, if God really has this great plan for me, then I need you to prove it. I need you to give me some sort of a sign."*

Then, knowing that an offering is required, Gideon goes home, prepares a goat, bakes some bread, makes some broth, and gives it to the angel as an offering.

The angel says thank you and tells Gideon to put his offering on a rock; stack the meat and bread, pour the broth all over it and stand back.

Gideon did as he was told. The angel touched the rock with his staff and the whole thing went up in flames right in front of his eyes, after which the angel disappeared.

About that time, Gideon gets into panic mode. Judges 6:22-23, *“When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, “Alas, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face! But the LORD said to him, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.”*”

Gideon’s scared because back then people believed that if anyone ever saw God they’d die. Even though the angel assured Gideon that he wouldn’t die, I believe Gideon had the proper perspective.

As I thought about Gideon’s response, it made me think, *“Many of us come to church on Sunday mornings and don’t think about the idea that we’re coming into the presence of God.”*

We sing songs about the presence of God, but I don’t know if we actually believe that God’s waiting in the wings ready to make His manifest presence known to us.

If He did, what type of response would we have? Would we fall on our knees and pray? Would we say, *“O, Sovereign Lord! I’m going to die.”* I don’t know, but I think Gideon had the right perspective.

So, what did Gideon do? Gideon built an altar for God and named the place *The Lord is Peace* because that was where he received the peace of God Who promised that He wouldn't destroy him.

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But, before God gave Gideon his marching orders, He had to get him ready. So, God tells him to tear down the altars to Baal that his father had built.

Judges 6:25-26, "That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering."

Remember these were Jewish people. These were the people that claimed allegiance to the one, true God, but they had fallen into idol worship.

That's what it meant in the beginning of Judges 6 when it said, *"The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD."*

Before Gideon could go out and win battles for God, he had to first go and deal with the situation in his own home. His own father had built an altar to both Baal and Asherah, fertility gods.

Gideon had to shut that situation down, but he was afraid because not only was this his father's altar and it was also where the community gathered to give their offerings to Baal and Asherah.

Operating on faith, he tore the alters down, but he did it under the cover of night.

You see he only had a little bit of faith. That's why he went under the cover of night. He was terrified that somebody would find out he was the one who did it.

Sure enough, they did. The next day, when the men in the community woke up, they saw the Asherah pole had been chopped in pieces and the altar destroyed.

Not only that, but they also saw the bull that was supposed to be offered to Baal now being offered to Yahweh. They were enraged.

After a thorough investigation, eventually somebody snitched on Gideon. So, they went and knocked on Gideon's father's door, Joash, and accused his son of sacrilege. They wanted to kill him.

Now, Joash is pretty quick on his feet. He told them, *"If Baal is really a god, let him contend for himself. Let him fight his own battles."* That shut them up.

As a side note here when we start witnessing and sharing Christ, sometimes we get a little preachy which puts people on the defensive. Then, when they start pushing back, we feel like we have to defend God.

The reality is we just make the situation worse. God can defend Himself. God says leave the revenge up to me.

Deuteronomy 32:35, *"It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."*

So, Joash makes this statement, and the men leave him alone, but they don't let Gideon off the hook. Mocking him, they gave him a nickname, *Jerub-Baal*.

Judges 6:32, *“So because Gideon broke down Baal’s altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal that day, saying, “Let Baal contend with him.”*

This was meant to be a subtle slam, but Gideon wore it as a badge of honor because he was someone who was willing to contend with Baal. In fact, Baal never did show up to do anything about it.

I think the most important thing is that Gideon’s beginning to understand something. He’s beginning to understand that this isn’t just any battle; this is a spiritual battle.

And in spiritual battle, you need spiritual resources. You need the spirit of God walking next to you. Just as Samson received the spirit of God to conquer the Philistines, Gideon received the spirit of God as he got ready for battle.

Judges 6:34, *“Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the **A-bee-ez-rites** to follow him.”*

By the time he was done gathering all the troops together, he had 32,000 men. As good as that sounds, he was still operating at a major disadvantage since the Midianites had about 135,000.

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As the time for battle got closer, Gideon began to get nervous about the situation.

But, being Gideon, what does he do? He asks for another sign, using a wool fleece, to verify that God was really going to save Israel by his hand.

Judges 6:37, *“Look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.”*

He's basically testing God and sure enough the next day he finds the fleece super wet. So wet that when he squeezed it, the water filled a bucket, yet the ground was dry.

Still not convinced, he asked for another sign. He told God, *"I'm going to put out the fleece again but this time when I get up in the morning, I want to see a dry fleece and a wet ground."*

Sure enough, he got up the next morning and that's what he found. Now, this is something that God, for some reason, allowed. He let Gideon have the signs that he requested.

As a side note, Christians who must make a major decision regarding their life, may ask for a sign by throwing a fleece out looking for God to help them make a tough decision.

I don't think that's totally wrong. But you must remember, what Gideon did isn't meant to be a pattern for us to follow. Meaning that every time we have a decision to make, we throw out a fleece or two.

We must remember, in this particular setting, in this particular time in history, in this particular context, in this particular place where God's bringing in specific deliverers to do a specific act, He's willing to let that person put out a fleece to confirm that calling.

It's a very specific thing that Gideon's doing. He wasn't throwing out a fleece so he could decide which parking spot to take. He's dealing with a major call in his life.

But, there are times in our walk where we're stumped. We might have a decision to make that may have a couple of critical options and, depending on which way we go, it could make a major difference in our life.

That's when we should spend serious time in prayer, serious time in devotion with God, serious time in consultation with others, but if we still can't get an answer, I don't think it's totally wrong to throw out a fleece.

Having said that, I'd also say to be careful about the fleece. When you put a fleece out, one thing to keep in mind is that the sign received will never contradict what's in the Word of God. Never.

Remember, the devil can use your fleece and give you a sign, too. Or we want to make a decision so badly, we create our own particular sign. We must be careful when we throw that fleece out.

Having said that, when you throw that fleece remember you may not get an answer. Or the answer simply might be, "*I've already given you the answer.*" In other words, open your Bible.

Here are a couple of examples. You're at work or someplace questioning should I really share Jesus with this person? God, I need a sign.

God's already given you a sign. It's in Matthew 28. It's called the Great Commission. Go forth and share the gospel. There's your sign. What more do you need?

Then there are those situations where people put out a request for a sign of some sort and God doesn't give them an answer. I think in those situations God may be saying it really doesn't matter.

Take this path or this path. It'll be fine. I'll be with you. In that situation, my approach has always been just simply pray, trust, and keep walking, until God shuts something and tells you to stop.

Gideon needed that fleece because he was going into battle where the odds were 4:1.

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Also, regardless of the signs, God expected something out of Gideon. He expected Gideon to step out farther in faith.

Right after this fleece situation, God looks at Gideon's army and says, *"You have too many troops. You need to thin the heard."*

He instructs Gideon to tell his men, *"If anybody's afraid to go into battle, they were free to go home."* Immediately, 22,000 men said thank-you and left. Now Gideon's army is down to 10,000 men. The odds are getting worse.

But God's still not satisfied. He says, *"You need to thin the ranks a little more. You still have too many men. Here's what I'm going to do, I'll help you select who'll stay and who gets to go home."*

Judges 7:4-5, *"But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink."*

When he did that 300 men ended up lapping like a dog while the rest basically got down on their knees put their face in the water.

Judges 7:7, *"The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home."*

Now Gideon's down to 300 men. 300 men against 135,000. That's about 450:1. I guarantee that if he wasn't shaking in his boots before, he's shaking in his boots now.

But, before Gideon could ask for another sign, God gave him a little help.

Judges 7:10-11, *“If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.” So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp.”*

Well, when they did as God instructed, they heard a conversation between two men.

One man was sharing a dream about a round loaf of barley bread which came tumbling into the camp striking a tent with such a force it overturned and collapsed.

The other man basically said, this must mean the sword of Gideon. God’s has given us into the hands of Gideon.

Now, how did he get that out of his dream? It’s that round loaf of barley bread and the tents. The barley bread was symbolic of the Israel people.

Since barley bread was considered the poor man’s bread, it was a reference to the Israelites who were hiding and starving because of the Midianites.

The tent represented people who live in tents, nomads, people that travel on camels, which basically was the Midianites.

When Gideon heard this, he left all excited. He goes back, awakens his men and said, *“Let’s go. The Lord’s given the Midianites into our hands.”*

After he separated the men into three companies of 100, he gave each of them a torch of some kind, a small jar to hide the light until they were ready to be used, and a trumpet.

They snuck into the camp during the changing guard, a very vulnerable time for the Midianites. Then Gideon blows his trumpet and smashes the jar to expose the light. The 300 men do the same.

Judges 7:20, "The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

This created chaos in the camp. In ancient warfare when being attacked, the enemy might have a few trumpets and a few torches, but now there were 300 torches and trumpets surrounding the whole camp.

When the Midianites saw this, they panicked. They didn't know what to do so they pulled their swords out and began to hack at each other. It was pure chaos.

Those that weren't killed got on their camels and tried to run and hide in the desert, but Gideon gathered the other tribes of Israel and pursued them.

In the end, the small army of Israelites killed 135,000 Midianites.

Judges 8:28, "Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land had peace forty years."

Slide 11

Conclusion

There are always lessons we can learn when we study individuals who God calls for special work.

First, this study of Gideon tells us that God can use anybody. He's not always after the strong, as He really likes to use the weak; people who think they're nobody.

People who don't have the education, the health, or the looks. People who don't have the mental capacity or come from dysfunctional homes. God uses the weak to shame the strong.

If you think you're too weak to be used, then that means you're ready to be used. Just be prepared. Remember, God sees things that are not as though they are.

Just as the angel saw Gideon as a mighty warrior, God sees each one of us as a mighty warrior.

No matter what people have said about us, no matter how much we've been put down in life, God sees each believer as a mighty warrior that's fully equipped to go in and face the battles of the world.

The second lesson is that, before we can go out into the world to take battle and deal with some of those problems, we must first go to our own house and look for things that maybe idols. Things that have gotten ahold of us.

Maybe we're spending too much time on social media, television, or whatever. Maybe we have some addictive behavior, drinking or smoking too much. Maybe we're just squandering our time.

Or perhaps it isn't just a house issue but really a heart issue. God's saying, *"I can use you on the battlefield but first you have to clean up your act."*

The third lesson gives me peace and comfort because Gideon was a guy who waffled back and forth in his faith.

One minute he was fearful, the next minute he was faithful. One minute he was hiding in the winepress, the next minute he was on the battlefield. This tells me that God's going to give us the faith we need when we need it.

I think when we hit some sort of crisis in life, we can easily start thinking, "How that's going to affect my future." God says, *"Don't worry about that stuff. I've given you enough faith to deal with the stuff you need to deal with right now."*

Gideon had to first just get out the winepress and take that initial step. He didn't have to go all the way into the battlefield at that time.

As we encounter any sort of dire situations in life, whether it's our health, finances, or whatever, we must understand that God gives us the faith we need when we need it.

We just have to look on a day-by-day basis and say, *"God I just need enough faith today to make that phone call or take that walk or go to that doctor."* God says, *"Okay. I'll give you that."*

You get that faith, then He says, *"Now you're prepared to go to the next step."* Step by step He keeps taking you farther down the road.

Before you know it, you have phenomenal faith, and you begin to deal with stuff that you thought you could never deal with because your faith has developed.

Finally, Gideon thought he was abandoned by God. Gideon's story is a reminder that no matter how bad things get in the world, God is always with us. God will not abandon us.

There's a passage in Romans that talks about the idea that nothing can separate us from the love of God that's found in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:39, *"Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

So, if we're in Christ Jesus that means nothing can separate us from the love of God, which means we have nothing fear.