

# Gideon

## ***The Period of the Judges***

- ❑ Read Hebrews 11:32. After Joshua died, Israel entered into the period of the Judges (the period prior to King Saul). Gideon was one of the “judges” of Israel (*Judges 6-8*).
  - 📖 “Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD ... they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths”<sup>1</sup> (*Judges 3:11-13*).

## ***The Call of Gideon***

- ❑ Because of the Israelites’ sin, God gave them into the hands of the Midianites, who oppressed them and made them poor (*6:1-6*). And they cried out to the LORD for help (*6:6*).
- ❑ The LORD called Gideon to deliver the Israelites (*6:11-14*).<sup>2</sup>
  - 📖 “But Lord,’ Gideon asked, ‘how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’ The LORD answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.’” (*6:15-16, NIV*)
- ❑ Gideon asked for a confirming sign, and God granted his request (*6:17-22*).<sup>3</sup>



## ***Cleaning House***

1. The Israelites were being oppressed and impoverished by the Midianites. Was this their main problem? If not, what was their main problem?
- ❑ Read Judges 6:25-32. Before Gideon could lead the Israelites as judge, he had to tear down his father’s altar and Asherah pole, and build a “proper kind of altar to the LORD.” This action demonstrated a denouncing of the idols and false gods, & a commitment to the one true God.
  - ❑ Before we can serve God, we need to “clean house.” We must forsake the idols and false gods in our lives, stand *against* the idols and false gods of our culture, and stand *for* God.
    2. In Gideon’s culture, the idols and false gods were the Baals, Ashtoreths, and Asherahs. What are the idols and false gods of our culture?<sup>4</sup>
    3. “Cleaning house” and taking a stand for God can be difficult. What are some of the difficulties we may face?<sup>5</sup>
  - ❑ When the men of the town threatened to kill Gideon, his father protected him. He argued, “If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself” (*6:31*). The truth does not need to be defended with violence. Every belief and practice, including Christianity, is not above examination. While human opinions vary, the truth stands firm, but we must be humble seekers of truth.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Baal” refers to the god of the Canaanites and others. “Ashtoreth” and “Asherah” refer to goddesses associated with Baal. Worship of Baal, Ashtoreth, and Asherah involved ritual prostitution and other immoral practices.

<sup>2</sup> Note that Gideon was “minding his own business.” There is no evidence that he was seeking a leadership position. And he was not guilty of overconfidence! As Christians, each of us should be ready to respond to God’s call.

<sup>3</sup> At first, Gideon lacked faith and needed much confirmation. He later asked for another sign – “the fleece” (*6:36-40*) which God graciously granted. God also encouraged Gideon through a Midianite’s dream (*7:11, 13-15*).

<sup>4</sup> Idols and false gods are not limited to the objects of worship in other religions. Anything that receives our supreme devotion can be called a “god,” and any thing that displaces the one true God can be called an “idol.”

<sup>5</sup> Though Gideon obeyed the LORD, he “was afraid of his family and the men of the town, [so] he did it at night rather than the daytime” (*6:27*). As Gideon feared, the reaction was severe – “[Gideon] must die” (*6:30*).

<sup>6</sup> Caution: Mere human capacity to discover is not enough. Knowledge of truth comes by God’s revelation.

## Making Room for God

□ Read Judges 7:1-8a. So the number of Gideon's men was reduced to 300, while their enemies were as "thick as locusts" with camels too numerous to count (7:12).

4. God decreased Gideon's troops 99%! How do you think Gideon felt? Why did God do this? (7:2-3)<sup>7</sup>
  
5. In the Christian life, we often rely too much on our own strength (e.g., our numbers, ideas, strategies, abilities, efforts, etc.). Why is it so easy to do this? How can we avoid doing this? How might God help us to avoid doing this?

📖 After Paul pleaded that God take away his "thorn in the flesh," the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Thus Paul responded, "Therefore ... I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 *Corinthians* 12:9-10, *NIV*)

## Trusting God in "Weakness"

□ Read Judges 7:16-22.<sup>8</sup> Gideon leads the Israelite victory. The fearful Gideon has learned to trust in the LORD, even in the "weakness" of an undersized army. The LORD is shown strong in human weakness.



## The Danger of "Success"

- In Judges 8, the picture of Gideon changes. "Having participated in a great deliverance, Gideon seems to [begin excluding] the Victor from His own victory."<sup>9</sup> It appears that success has gone to Gideon's head. He begins to act more in his own strength. Even cowards can become overconfident with a little success.
6. We all desire success, but success can be dangerous. Even the Christian who prays that God would make his/her efforts successful easily forgets his/her dependence on God when success comes. Why does this happen? How can we avoid it?

## Reflection/Application

- Who, or what, do you serve or "worship?" To whom, or what, do you give your supreme devotion? (It may not be a supernatural being.) Is he/she or it truly *worthy* of worship? Only the one true God is worthy of our worship. What do you think about Him?
- As a Christian, are you ready for God's service? Do you need to "clean house?" Do you need to "make room for God" by setting aside reliance on your own strength? Evaluate your tendencies to rely on your own strength or take too much credit for your successes. Humble yourself before the Lord, and ask him to show His power through your "weakness."

<sup>7</sup> Besides the stated reason (7:2-3), there could be other practical reasons suggested by the text.

<sup>8</sup> Like Joshua's plan at Jericho (Joshua 6:1-5), the strategy seems ineffective, or even ridiculous (though it is an interesting case of psychological warfare). Unlike Jericho, the Bible does not say that God explicitly gave the plan. However, it is likely that God revealed this plan to Gideon.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas L. Constable, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/judges.pdf>, p. 51. Perhaps Gideon's words "For the LORD and for Gideon" (7:18) revealed the direction of Gideon's thinking about himself.