

## GIDEON – PART ONE

Introduction:

1. There is more written about Gideon in the book of Judges than of any other judge.
2. Following the 40 years of rest brought about by the work of Deborah and Barak, the Israelites once again angered God with their rebellion and idolatry.
3. Thus, God allowed them to be oppressed for seven years by Midian.
4. Gideon was the man chosen by God to deliver Israel from their enemies.

I. God's Anger – *The Oppression of the Midianites* (6:1-10)

- A. The story repeats – Israel sins and God allows them to be oppressed by their enemies.
- B. This time, they are oppressed by the Midianites along with the Amalekites and the “children of the east” – a reference to the Arabians.
  1. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by his wife, Keturah (Genesis 25:2).
  2. They dwelt south of Edom, near the eastern side of the Red Sea.
  3. Eventually, the name “Midian” came to represent a confederation of desert tribes in the region, including descendants of Ishmael.
  4. When Moses fled from Egypt, he dwelt in Midian and married a Midianite woman, Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, the Midianite priest (Exodus 2:15-16, 21; 3:1; etc.).
  5. When Balaam attempted to curse the nation of Israel, Midianite women seduced the Israelite men to commit whoredom (Num. 25).
  6. From that time forward, there was animosity between the two peoples.
- C. This oppression was different for the Midianites did not occupy the land.
  1. Instead, they led raids into the land of Israel to pillage and plunder.
  2. Each year at harvest, they would attack and steal the crops and flocks of Israel.
  3. Never sure when an attack would come, the Israelites were forced to flee into the mountains and caves to find a place of safety.
- D. Thus, Israel was greatly impoverished – bereft of houses, clothing, and food.
- E. Finally, they cried out to God.
- F. However, before sending a judge to deliver the people, God sent a prophet.
  1. This prophet is not named, but his message is clear and simple.
  2. Jehovah is the only true God!
  3. He had protected and prospered the children of Israel.
  4. In return, they had worshipped and revered false gods – the idols of Baal.
  5. It was their disobedience that had brought about their suffering.
- G. Israel needed to hear the word of the Lord and repent so that they would appreciate and take advantage of their deliverance.

II. God's Angel – *The Call of Gideon* (6:11-24)

- A. The name Gideon means “he that cuts down” or “feller of trees.”
  1. This may have a practical meaning in describing Gideon's strength in labor.
  2. However, he would do much more than cut down trees.
  3. Gideon would tear down idols and the enemies of God's people.
- B. Gideon is introduced as a man working to thresh wheat in secret.

Judges 6 – 8

1. Gideon was the youngest son of Joash (6:15).
2. His family was considered poor in the tribe of Manassah.
3. Some think that his brothers had already been killed by the Midianites (8:18-19).
4. Thus, Gideon was doing his part to provide for the family.
- C. As he worked, an angel of the Lord sat under an oak tree in Ophrah and spoke to him.
- D. The words from God were meant to encourage and strengthen Gideon.
  1. Gideon was not an idolater like his father, for the Lord was with him.
  2. Later, God verifies this fact by accepting Gideon's offering.
  3. Furthermore, he was honored by God as a mighty warrior.
- E. Instead, Gideon reacted with frustration, suspicion, and doubt.
  1. It must be understood that this reaction was a result of Gideon's discouragement.
  2. Compared to the miraculous wonders that had been experienced by his ancestors, Gideon must have felt that he was as far away from God as possible.
  3. Gideon said, "If the Lord be with us," but God had said that He was with Gideon.
  4. Israel's sins had separated them from God.
  5. But, Gideon's faithfulness could serve to secure their deliverance.
- F. Thus, God further encourages Gideon to act because God has sent him.
- G. Again, Gideon's reply is less than we would hope – he makes excuses about his unworthiness to serve God or Israel.
  1. Again, Gideon is suffering great discouragement alongside the rest of the nation.
  2. It seems that his humility is genuine, though misguided.
- H. But, God reminds him that with Jehovah on his side, Gideon could defeat the Midianites by himself.
- I. Notice that as the text has progressed the One initially described as an angel of the Lord is revealed to be the Lord Himself.
- J. Gideon asks for a sign, so that he might be sure of both the messenger and the message.
  1. He prepares meat, broth, and unleavened bread to offer to the visitor.
    - a. This was a detailed work that would have taken over an hour.
    - b. It was also a generous offering, considering the poverty of Gideon and his family.
    - c. Indeed, this was a sacrifice to be offered to the Lord.
  2. Upon returning, the angel instructed Gideon to place the offering upon a rock.
  3. When fire came from the rock and consumed the offering, it was a sign to Gideon that the Lord accepted his sacrifice and worship.
- K. Upon granting Gideon a sign, the Lord disappeared.
- L. Gideon understood that he had been in the presence of God, and he feared for his life.
- M. However, God comforted him again by saying, "Thou shalt not die."
- N. So, Gideon built an altar and called it "Jehovah (or, the Lord) is my peace."

Judges 6 – 8

- III. Gideon's Action – *The Battle over Baal* (6:25-32)
- A. Before God sent Gideon into the major battle against the Midianites, He tested him with a smaller, yet significant conflict.
    - 1. God is patient with His children, allowing them time to mature (cf. 1 Samuel 17:32-37; Matthew 14:31; 25:21).
    - 2. We must learn to be patient with one another (Rom. 14:1).
    - 3. However, it must be remembered that God expects us to grow (1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2).
  - B. Still, this was a difficult challenge for Gideon to face.
    - 1. He welcomed with joy the good news that God would help Israel.
    - 2. He struggled with the practical facts that he would have to risk and sacrifice much to see God's will done.
  - C. He was to use his father's bulls to tear down the idolatrous altar and image in his hometown – built on his father's property.
    - 1. Faithfulness must begin at home!
    - 2. Altars to Baal were built on hills and the high places of a village.
    - 3. Beside them would be the Ashera – a wooden pillar or pole dedicated to the worship of the female goddess, counterpart to Baal.
    - 4. The KJV always translates this word as "grove," because often there was a grove of trees viewed as a natural temple for Baal worship.
    - 5. Gideon was to tear down Baal's altar, replace it with a properly ordered altar to Jehovah, and use the Ashera pole as wood for the fire on which his father's bull was to be offered.
  - D. This would place Gideon at variance with his father and family.
    - 1. Even though he was afraid, Gideon "did as the LORD had said."
    - 2. He placed God above his family (cf. Matthew 10:37).
  - E. This would place Gideon at variance with his community.
    - 1. He was not swayed by the "political correctness" of his day.
    - 2. He placed God above his friends (cf. Acts 4:19; 5:29).
  - F. Then, he was to replace idolatry with the true worship of Jehovah.
    - 1. Again, this was not popular among his neighbors.
    - 2. However, this is the essence of Restoration...
      - a. Removal of that which is unauthorized
      - b. Replacement with that which is authorized
    - 3. The duty of Christians is to help their neighbors replace their idolatry with true worship (cf. John 4:24).
  - G. In the end, Gideon's father defended his son and made a powerful indictment against idolatry.
    - 1. The courage and faithfulness of one individual has the power to inspire others to the same high ideals.
    - 2. The faith of Joash is restored by the example of his son! *{Sadly, the opposite should have been true – the father is to teach the son!}*
    - 3. Joash illustrates the pure folly of worshipping idols – they cannot even defend themselves against the actions of men.
    - 4. Gideon is given the name Jerubbaal meaning, "Baal fighter," "contender with Baal," or "let Baal contend."
  - H. Gideon has proved his faithfulness to God and his readiness for the larger task of delivering the nation from the hand of her enemies.

## GIDEON – PART TWO

Introduction:

1. The first part of the study of Gideon dealt with things that were foundational to his victory in the battle with the Midianites.
2. Gideon had to learn to overcome discouragement and fear in order to lead God's people to victory.
3. He had to learn to trust God and to act upon his faith.
4. The second part of his story deals with the preparation for battle.

IV. Gideon's Test (6:33-40)

- A. Following Gideon's removal of the altar of Baal, the Midianites – with a force of at least 135,000 men, plus an innumerable host of camels (8:10; 7:12) – gathered in the valley of Jezreel.
- B. At the Lord's command, Gideon began gathering troops to meet the Midianites in battle.
  1. He began in his hometown (cf. 6:11).
    - a. Apparently, Gideon's actions had inspired not only his father, but his neighbors as well.
    - b. Those who previously wanted Gideon to be killed were now willing to follow him into battle.
  2. He then sent word throughout the nearest tribes – Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali – and they also sent soldiers to fight with Gideon.
- C. Yet, Gideon still had some fear and doubts.
- D. So, he presented a test to God as a means of assuring himself that he was doing God's will.
  1. First, he asked God to place the morning dew on a fleece of wool he placed upon the ground, but for the ground itself to be dry.
  2. Second, he asked God to keep the fleece dry while the ground was wet with the dew.
  3. On both occasions, God granted Gideon's petitions.
- E. God provides evidence for His children's faith.
  1. Consider Pharaoh in Egypt...
  2. Consider Jesus and His miracles...
  3. Consider the apostles...
  4. Consider the Word of God...

V. God's Test (7:1-8)

- A. Gideon had put God to the test to see if He would save Israel as He had said.
- B. Now it was God's turn to put Gideon to the test to see if he would overcome his doubt and fear and obey God completely.
- C. As Gideon gathered the army of Israel together, God declared that it was too large.
  1. While Midian had a force of at least 135,000 men, Israel's army consisted of only 32,000 soldiers.
  2. Obviously, Israel was outnumbered; so, why would the Lord further diminish their ranks?
- D. God wanted the children of Israel to recognize that their victory was by His doing and not their own.

Judges 6 – 8

1. This was a test of Gideon's faith.
  2. It was a test of the Israelites' faith.
  3. A victory won by faith would bring glory to God, whereas a victory won by might would elevate the pride of Israel (cf. 2 Chron. 26:15-16).
  - E. So, God commanded the fearful to leave the battlefield (cf. Deut. 20:8).
    1. Fear is a dangerous contagion on the field of battle.
    2. It will spread through an army and cripple it.
    3. It cannot coexist with faith – one must win over the other.
  - F. 22,000 Israelites returned home in fear, leaving Gideon with 10,000 men.
  - G. But, God declared that the number was still too large.
  - H. So, He devised a test to further decrease the size of Israel's army.
    1. God told Gideon to observe how the men drank water and to set aside those who lapped as a dog from those who drank while on their knees.
    2. There were 300 men who lapped water from their hands.
    3. These were chosen by God to fight against the Midianites.
    4. We are not told why God chose one group over the other.
    5. But, the lesson is to be faithful and diligent in every work, for we do not always know when we are being tested.
  - I. With the number down to 300, God was ready to prove His power in giving victory to Israel.
  - J. So, those men took their food and their trumpets and prepared to face the host of Midian.
- VI. God's Assurance (7:9-15)
- A. That very night, God instructed Gideon to begin the attack.
  - B. However, Gideon is still plagued with doubts.
  - C. So, God instructs him to listen to the words in the Midianite camp and find encouragement for the battle.
    1. On this occasion, God provides assurance for Gideon before he even asks for it.
    2. We should be grateful that God is so patient and understanding with our weaknesses.
  - D. From verse 12, we get an understanding of why Gideon was afraid.
  - E. However, he heard a Midianite soldier speak of a dream that was interpreted to mean that Israel would prevail in battle.
  - F. Thus, Gideon was encouraged and led his fellow Israelites into battle.
  - G. In our battle against Satan and the forces of evil, God is our source of strength and encouragement.

## GIDEON – PART THREE

- VII. Faith Is the Victory (7:16-25)
- A. A key verse to sum up this battle is Hebrews 11:6.
  - B. Gideon has finally moved into true faith.
    - 1. He believed in God.
    - 2. He learned to trust God and His Word (note verse 15).
    - 3. Now he is ready to obey God.
  - C. He began to act with complete confidence in the victory that God would provide.
    - 1. Consider that he divided his forces into three companies.
    - 2. Consider the weapons that he chose for them to use in battle.
    - 3. Consider his willingness to lead by example.
    - 4. Consider the instructions for winning the battle.
    - 5. Consider the shout that the soldiers were to make. *{God had a part to play in the victory, but so did Gideon!}*
  - D. Faith sees the invisible and does the impossible.
    - 1. Gideon had become a new man – no more hiding in the shadows.
    - 2. While we all may have our doubts and fears, eventually we must come into the boldness of true faith.
    - 3. The message of Scripture is that people can change (cf. John 1:42; 2 Corinthians 5:17).
  - E. The battle itself is a demonstration of true faith.
    - 1. The men moved without fear – though greatly outnumbered.
    - 2. They obeyed the instructions exactly.
    - 3. Every man stood in his place! (Cf. Exodus 14:13-14; Ezekiel 22:30; Nehemiah 4:6, 16-18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31)
    - 4. They worked together in unity.
  - F. The Midianites, seemingly fearing that they were surrounded, “ran and cried and fled.”
    - 1. Some of this confusion came as a result of Gideon’s strategy.
    - 2. However, God also had a hand in setting “every man’s sword against his fellow.”
  - G. Israel began to pursue the fleeing Midianites with the help of those who had previously been sent from the battlefield.
  - H. The tribe of Ephraim was victorious over two princes, killing both Oreb and Zeeb.
    - 1. When we first met Gideon, he was threshing in hiding behind a winepress.
    - 2. When this battle ends, it is with the death of Zeeb at his winepress.
    - 3. With God’s help and Israel’s faith, the tables have turned for the children of God.
  - I. This battle became a landmark event in Israel’s history.
    - 1. God’s help was remembered in the psalms (Psalm 83:9-12).
    - 2. It gave them assurance that a remnant would return from captivity (Isaiah 10:20-27).
    - 3. It gave them hope that God would keep His promise of sending the Messiah (Isaiah 9:2-7).
  - J. May we learn from this battle as well – God is not dependent upon largeness of numbers, but upon greatness of faith.

## GIDEON – PART FOUR

Introduction:

1. So far, we have studied the foundational events in Gideon’s life that prepared him to lead Israel in battle against the Midianites.
2. We have studied Gideon’s preparation for the battle and the battle itself.
3. We have seen God’s faithfulness in giving victory to His people when they faithfully obeyed His will.
4. Now, we come to the last part of Gideon’s story – the aftermath of the battle.
5. In chapter 7, we stood on the mountaintop of faithfulness and victory.
6. In chapter 8, we return to the valley of division, disunity, and rebellion.

VIII. The Conflict with Ephraim and Succoth (8:1-21)

- A. Some have referred to chapter 8 of Judges as “winning the battle, but losing the war.”
  1. Someone once said, “Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle.”
  2. Just because Israel had defeated Midian did not mean that every problem, temptation, and enemy had been removed.
  3. Just because you or I have become Christians does not mean that we can become lazy or lax in our spiritual defenses.
- B. The tribe of Ephraim considered itself of great importance among God’s people.
  1. Ephraim was one of the largest and most populated tribes.
  2. Both Bethel and Shiloh were located within the borders of Ephraim.
  3. Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8).
  4. In Jacob’s prophecy, Ephraim was placed before Manasseh (Gen. 48:14ff).
  5. Isaiah describes them as proud and arrogant (Isaiah 9:9).
  6. By Hosea’s day, the northern kingdom was often called Ephraim (Hosea 4:17; 5:3-14; 6:4, 10; 7:1, 8, 11; etc.).
- C. Thus, the pride of Ephraim led them into conflict with Gideon.
  1. With great anger and harshness they contended with him over his decision not to call them to the battle with Midian.
  2. Considering their arrogance, Gideon may have been wise to leave them out of his battle plans.
  3. However, they had been involved in the capture of two princes of Midian (cf. 7:24-25).
- D. Gideon reacted with wisdom and a little bit of flattery and reminded them of their role in the victory. *{A lesson in self-control and self-denial}*
  1. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).
  2. Gideon, with a soft answer, was able to defuse and neutralize the anger of Ephraim.
  3. Thus, Gideon did not waste time arguing when there was still fighting that needed to be done.
- E. Gideon and his 300 men continued pursuing the enemy, even though they were exhausted.
- F. They came to the city of Succoth and asked for food to strengthen them in their pursuit of the Midianites.

Judges 6 – 8

1. Those who fight the good fight of faith need help and support!
  2. This is what fellowship is all about (cf. 2 John 1:9-11; 3 John 1:6-8).
  - G. However, the leaders of Succoth (in Gad, across the Jordan) refused to help. *{A soft answer for his critics; but a stern rebuke for those who hindered the fight and aided the enemy}*
    1. They were afraid of the political consequences if Gideon failed in his mission.
    2. They acted out of fear instead of faith.
    3. It is one thing to criticize the way something is being done; it is another to work to hinder those who are doing it.
    4. Pride is a serious sin, but rebellion and aiding the enemy is something else entirely!
  - H. The same thing happened at the city of Penuel.
  - I. Gideon promised punishment upon both of these cities when he captured the leaders of Midian.
  - J. Finally, Gideon caught up with the fleeing army of the Midianites.
    1. There were only 15,000 men left following the battle.
    2. Gideon and his forces attacked and defeated their enemies – still 300 versus 15,000.
    3. Their kings – Zebah and Zalmunna – fled but were captured by Gideon.
  - K. Upon returning to Succoth and Penuel, Gideon carried out his promised punishments.
  - L. Then, the two kings of Midian were killed by Gideon – and the battle was finally ended.
- IX. The Conflict with God (8:22-35)
- A. The last part of this chapter deals with Gideon in his “retirement.”
    1. While we all long to retire from work and have time to enjoy other parts of life, we must not let our guard down or think we have reached a point where we can “coast into Heaven.”
    2. The Christian never retires from the life of discipleship!
  - B. For all that God had done for Israel, they still had not learned their lesson.
  - C. Instead of being content with God as their King and Father, the people desired Gideon to become their ruler.
    1. Again, this is one of the main themes of the book of Judges – Israel’s refusal to recognize God as their rightful king.
    2. It is because they reject His rule that they continue to fall into sin and oppression.
  - D. Thankfully, Gideon had the right attitude and encouraged Israel to follow no one but Jehovah.
  - E. Still, he stumbled by asking for gold and creating a golden ephod that became an idol to the children of Israel.
  - F. Gideon stumbled again by taking many wives which gave him 70 sons, including Abimelech.
  - G. Finally, Gideon died and was buried in Ophrah.
  - H. Immediately following his death, Israel returned to their worship of Baal.
    1. They forgot God and His deliverance.
    2. They forgot Gideon and his courage and faith.
  - I. So, after 40 years of rest, another period of tribulation would arise for the tribes of Israel.