

# GIDEON

Judges 6 - 8

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Gideon

**Key-location:** Canaan

**Key-repetitions:**

- Throughout the book of Judges, the Israelites experienced cycles of: turning away from God; the Lord raising up enemies who oppressed them; the Israelites cried for help; the Lord raised up a judge who delivered them; when the judge died, the people returned to their old ways and became worse than their fathers.

- The repeated failures of the Israelites: the Israelites did evil again (6:1); Gideon made an idol of gold (8:22-27); the Israelites prostituted themselves by worshipping Gideon's idol (8:28); when Gideon died, the Israelites prostituted by worshipping the god Baal (8:33-34).

- Gideon asked for and received signs from God: Gideon wanted proof that God was speaking to him, and God consumed with fire Gideon's offering (6:17-21); Gideon asked for dew to be on the wool fleece and the ground to be dry (6:36-38); Gideon asked for the wool fleece to be dry and ground covered with dew (6:39-40).

- God told Gideon to reduce the size of his army: all who were afraid were to turn back (7:1-3); those who knelt down to drink with their face in the water were sent home (7:5-8).

- The smaller overcame the larger: Gideon was the runt in the weakest clan in the Manasseh tribe (6:15); Gideon's army of 300 scattered the eastern people's army of 135,000 soldiers (7:19-22); Gideon's army of 300 defeated with a surprise attack the 15,000 eastern soldiers who had survived the initial attack (8:10-11).

**Key-attitudes:**

- The Israelites' rebellion against God.
- God's mercy.
- The despair and humiliation of the oppressed

Israelites.

- The insecurity of Gideon.

- Conflict: The Israelites' conflict with their enemies.

**Initial-situation:**

The Israelites never expelled all the Canaanites from their land (Jud 1:1-28). The Lord's angel told them that they had disobeyed him and that the people of the land would be like thorns and their gods would be traps to them. The people wept (2:1-5). The people served the Lord as long as Joshua was alive and during the lifetime of the older leaders (2:7-9).

Another generation grew up that served the god Baal and the goddess Ashtoreth. Baal was the god of the storm and rains; therefore, he was thought to control vegetation and agriculture. Ashtoreth was the mother goddess of love, war and fertility.

The Israelites experienced cycles of: The Lord raised up enemies who oppressed them; they cried for help; the Lord raised up a judge who delivered them; when the judge died, the people returned to their old ways and became worse than their fathers (2:6-19). The Lord's anger blazed against Israel, and he no longer drove out the people of the land. The Israelites intermarried with the people and served the gods of those people (2:20 - 3:5).

**Initial-problem:**

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. The Lord put them under the domination of Midian for seven years.

**Final-situation:**

In those days Israel had no king, and everyone did what he thought was right. As a result, each generation became worse than the generation of their fathers.

## BIBLE STORY

When the generation who remembered Joshua died, another generation grew up that served the god Baal and goddess Ashtoreth. Then the Israelites experienced cycles of: The Lord raising up enemies who oppressed them; they cried for help; the Lord raised up a judge who delivered them; when the judge died, the people returned to their old ways and became worse than their fathers. During the time when judges ruled, Israel had no king; everyone did what he thought was right, and each generation became worse than the one of his parents (Judges 1 - 21).

## Gideon

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. The Lord put them under the domination of Midian for seven years. The Midianites and other eastern peoples invaded the country and destroyed the crops that the Israelites had planted. They took all their sheep, cattle and donkeys. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help (6:1-5).

One day the Lord's angel came and sat under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash, the father of Gideon. Gideon was separating wheat from the chaff in a winepress. The process of separating the grains of wheat from the useless outer shell called chaff, was normally done on the top of a hill, where the wind could blow away the lighter chaff when the beaten wheat was thrown into the air. If Gideon had done this, he would have been seen by the Midianite raiders. Therefore, he separated wheat from the chaff in a winepress, a pit that was hidden from view.

The Lord's angel appeared to Gideon and said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

Gideon replied, "If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his miracle wonders that our fathers told us about? The Lord has abandoned us and turned us over to Midian."

The Lord answered, "Go with your strength and save Israel out of Midian's hand!"

Gideon asked, "But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in the Manasseh tribe, and I am the runt in my family."

The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites."

Gideon replied, "If you are serious, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me."

Gideon prepared a young goat, and used over twenty quarts of flour to make bread without yeast. He brought them out and offered them to the angel. Gideon put the offering on a rock under the shade of the oak tree.

The angel stretched out the tip of a stick and touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread! The angel of the Lord vanished. Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord and he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!"

But the Lord said to him, "Peace! Do not panic. You will not die" (6:11-24).

The Midianites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. (There were more than one hundred and thirty-five thousand soldiers (see 8:10). The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew his ram's horn trumpet and sent messengers calling different Israelite tribes to arms. Thirty-two thousand Israelite men came (6:33-35).

Gideon said to God, "If you will use me to save Israel as you have promised, 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 use me to save Israel." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew, a bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, "Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." That night God made it happen. The fleece was dry; the ground was wet with dew (6:36-40).

The Lord told Gideon, "Your army is too large for me to deliver Midian into your hands. The Israelites will brag saying they won the battle with their own strength. Announce to the people,

“Anyone who is afraid may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.” So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained (7:1-3).

The Lord told Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will make a final cut.”

Gideon took the men down to the water. The Lord told him, “Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink, with their face in the water.” Three hundred men cupped their hands to bring water to their mouths and lapped with their tongues from their cupped hands. The rest got down on their knees, put their face in the water and drank.

The Lord said to Gideon, “I will use the three hundred men who lapped at the stream. Let the other men go home.” So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents, but kept the three hundred. He took the jars and trumpets of those who went home (7:5-8).

Gideon divided the three hundred men into three companies. He gave each man a trumpet and an empty jar. A burning torch was inside each jar.

Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the enemy camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. All three groups of Gideon’s men blew their trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands. Then they shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!” Each of Gideon’s men stayed in his place around the camp. But inside the camp, the men of Midian began shouting and running away.

When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on one another with their swords (7:16-25).

There had been more than one hundred and thirty-five thousand soldiers of the eastern people. Only fifteen thousand survived the initial attack. They fled and crossed the Jordan River. Gideon and his three hundred men crossed over the Jordan River. With a surprise attack the three hundred defeated the unsuspecting fifteen thousand (8:4-21).

The Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us because you have saved us from Midian’s tyranny.”

Gideon replied, “I will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you. I do have one request. Would each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder?” The Ishmaelite men wore gold earrings and Gideon’s men had their pockets full of them.

They answered, “We’ll be glad to give them.” So they spread out a garment, and each man threw a ring from his plunder onto it. The gold earrings came to about forty-three pounds. Gideon used the gold to make an idol, which he placed in his hometown. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping the idol. It became a trap that caused Gideon and his family to sin (8:22-27).

Thus Midian’s tyranny was broken by the Israelites. During Gideon’s lifetime, the land enjoyed peace for forty years. Gideon died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash (8:28-32).

Immediately after Gideon died, the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baal gods. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the Lord their God, who had rescued them from all their enemies who resided all around them. They also failed to honor Gideon’s family for all the good things he had done for them (8:33-35).

## GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

## SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What different ways did Gideon express that he did not feel capable of taking on the task that God gave him?
2. Give examples of how the Israelites disobeyed God?
3. What were the consequences of the Israelites disobeying God?
4. How did God use that which was considered weak and inferior to do his work?
5. What excuses have you used to avoid doing God's will for your life?

## LIFE-LESSONS

1. God is active in history. The book of the Judges gives a theological account of history. Israel abandoned God for Baal. God then abandoned Israel allowing oppressors to dominate them; Israel called on God for help; then God sent a liberator to deliver the Israelites.

God, he should obey it instead of seeking more confirmation.
2. It is easy for a person to overlook personal accountability and blame his problems on God. Gideon questioned God about the problems his nation faced and about God's apparent lack of help. He didn't acknowledge that the people brought calamity upon themselves when they decided to disobey and neglect God (6:13).
3. Fear results in a person seeking extra signs from God when he should be taking action to obey God's commands. Gideon didn't use the fleece of wool to discover God's will (6:37), because the angel had already told him what he should do (6:14, 16). The fleece of wool was used to strengthen his weak faith. Proverbs 3:5 and James 1:5-8 give advice on discovering God's will. Also, whenever a person receives a command from
4. A small number of the weak who put their trust in God have advantage over the multitudes who are strong but do not have God on their side. Gideon the coward was hiding in a wine press from the Midianites. He belonged to the weakest clan in his tribe and he was the runt in his family (6:11-15). God used Gideon and three hundred men to defeat thousands (5:7:16-25).
5. It is often easier to be faithful to God during a crisis time than during prosperity. Gideon was faithful to God during the crisis of war, but after victory when he enjoyed prosperity he was unfaithful. He made an idol and had children with a lot of different women (8:22-30).
6. People who do not respond to God's love may seek him when in pain. The Israelites did not remain faithful to God when they were blessed with the benefits of his love. However, whenever they suffered, they remembered God and clamored to him.