

Gideon (Judges 6)

We're going to investigate an account that we find fairly early in the Bible of the calling of a man called Gideon. In those days (after Israel had left Egypt and entered the promised land but before their first King) Israel, God's special nation, had leaders called 'Judges'. The intro to this report tells us about the trouble that Israel were in with their neighbours, the nation of Midian, destroying their crops and attacking them so that they were stuck hiding in caves....

If you were an Israelite in this sort of situation what sort of leader would you want?

What affect would it have on the Israelites that Midian were destroying their crops?

Again the Israelites did what the LORD said was wrong. So for seven years the LORD handed them over to Midian. Because the Midianites were very powerful and were cruel to Israel, the Israelites made hiding places in the mountains, in caves, and in safe places. Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other peoples from the east would come and attack them. They camped in the land and destroyed the crops that the Israelites had planted as far away as Gaza. They left nothing for Israel to eat, and no sheep, cattle, or donkeys. The Midianites came with their tents and their animals like swarms of locusts to ruin the land. There were so many people and camels they could not be counted. Israel became very poor because of the Midianites, so they cried out to the LORD.

When the Israelites cried out to the LORD against the Midianites, the LORD sent a prophet to them. He said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you out of Egypt, the land of slavery. I saved you from the Egyptians and from all those who were against you. I forced the Canaanites out of their land and gave it to you. Then I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God. Live in the land of the Amorites, but do not worship their gods.' But you did not obey me."

The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak tree at Ophrah that belonged to Joash, one of the Abiezrite people. Gideon, Joash's son, was separating some wheat from the chaff in a winepress to keep the wheat from the Midianites. The angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon and said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior!"

Then Gideon said, "Sir, if the LORD is with us, why are we having so much trouble? Where are the miracles our ancestors told us he did when the LORD brought them out of Egypt? But now he has left us and has handed us over to the Midianites."

The LORD turned to Gideon and said, "Go with your strength and save Israel from the Midianites. I am the one who is sending you."

But Gideon answered, "Lord, how can I save Israel? My family group is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family."

The LORD answered him, "I will be with you. It will seem as if the Midianites you are fighting are only one man."

What have Israel done upset God?

Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress to hide and is the least important member of the weakest family and he doesn't seem to have much faith. What sort of a man is Gideon?

Is he the man you would want to lead your country at this difficult time? Why?

What does God say about Gideon? Would you agree?

What does God say that He will help Gideon to do?

Do you think God's choice of leader is strange and do you think it will work? Why?

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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."

So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

What do you think might happen to Gideon if everyone realises what he has done?

This was clearly a very difficult and scary thing for Gideon to do. Do you think it is fair of God to ask Gideon to do something so scary? Why?

Gideon asks God to prove that He is with Him and God answers, you can find that part of the story in Judges 6:17-24. Asherah and Baal were false gods that local tribes worshipped.

What does God ask Gideon to do first?

What was God's priority; defeating Midian or getting rid of the false gods from Israel?

Why do you think that is?

In a time when food was in short supply it was a fully-grown bull would have been worth a lot. Why do you think God asked or such a difficult sacrifice?

In the morning when the people of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!

They asked each other, "Who did this?"

When they carefully investigated, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it."

The people of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."

But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." So because Gideon broke down Baal's altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal that day, saying, "Let Baal contend with

Gideon went on to lead a tiny army out against the Midianites and lead Israel to an incredible victory. After getting rid of the idols and things that were getting in the way of Israel's relationship Gideon went on to live an incredible life of following God and became the mighty warrior that God saw in him from the start. Also Israel went from looking to false gods and idols for protection to trusting in God to save them.

Gideon's life of following God was scary, dangerous and full of sacrifice. Do you think it was worth it?

Why?

Things to think about:

Do you see yourself as the weakest, smallest and least important like Gideon did?

If so maybe it is time to find out what God says about you?

What are the idols and things that you might be putting your trust in instead of God?