

## **THE LIFE OF GIDEON:**

Last week we looked at Samson. He broke every one of his Nazarite vows and didn't even realise when the Lord had left him. All that potential wasted because he gave in to his desires and was completely self-centered. He wasted his life.

This morning, we will look at another Judge called Gideon. The first five books of the Bible end with the death of Moses, and the people of Israel getting ready to enter the promised land. Then we read about Joshua, the successor of Moses, leading the people of Israel into that land and taking possession. Joshua eventually dies, and as the people begin to settle, they appoint leaders known as Judges. Sadly, the book's final verse sums up what happened.

**<sup>25</sup> In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit. Judges 21:25.**

Unfortunately, the time of the judges has often been called the dark ages of Israel. We see this cycle of leadership and behaviour. The people cry out to God, and he sends a leader or judge. Then they fall back and worship other gods and forget the one true God. So, God, attempting to get their attention so they would turn things around, would allow them to fall into the hands of other nations. Then, while under that oppression and persecution, they would come to their senses and cry out to God for deliverance. Then God would raise up a judge who would do just that.

However, once rescued, they would go right back to their old ways. It's a sad, sick, ongoing cycle throughout the book. Seven times they abandoned God. Seven times they fell into the hands of other nations. Seven times God delivered them. Judges during this time included such names as Deborah, Samson and Samuel. But we're going to look at the very first one God raised up. His name was Gideon. Here's how his story starts:

**<sup>1</sup> The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. <sup>2</sup> Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. <sup>3</sup> Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. <sup>4</sup> They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. <sup>5</sup> They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. <sup>6</sup> Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help. Judges 6:1-6.**

This time the trouble came from the Midianites. They were the fiercest warriors on the planet because they had developed a new way of fighting and invading through the use of a new technology that had never been harnessed before. It was the camel. Up until the Midianites, nobody had harnessed the power of that animal for riding, traveling, or fighting. Suddenly they had speed, a higher elevation for arrows and spears, protection, and an additional weapon through charging and trampling.

So, God send them a judge. **<sup>11</sup> The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup> When the angel of the Lord appeared to**

Gideon, he said, **"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."**<sup>13</sup> **"Pardon me, my lord,"** Gideon replied, **"but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."** Judges 6:11-13.

<sup>14</sup> The Lord turned to him and said, **"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"**<sup>15</sup> **"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."**<sup>16</sup> The Lord answered, **"I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."**<sup>17</sup> Gideon replied, **"If now I have found favour in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me."**<sup>18</sup> **Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you."** And the Lord said, **"I will wait until you return."** Judges 6:14-18.

Gideon's initial response is scepticism not faith. He seems totally unimpressed by an Angel's initial appearance and greeting. This may be because Gideon is incapable of understanding the supernatural. He has been totally converted into the worldview of Canaan and worships other Gods. He has no understanding of God as the maker of the heavens and earth.

So, God calls Gideon, and his first reaction is to blame God. The reality is that the Israelites sin, turning from God, worshipping other Gods have brought these things upon them. They, themselves are the cause of the problems, not God. Gideon is ignorant of God's covenant with Israel. He and his family are worshippers of Baal and Asherah! K. Lawson Younger comments in his application commentary on Judges and Ruth, **"To, him, God may have worked long ago but no longer cares about Israel. Biblical faith has lost its relevance in the present situation"**.

Let's keep reading. <sup>14</sup> The Lord turned to him and said, **"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"** <sup>15</sup> **"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."** Judges 6:14-15.

So, he tells God that his clan, his family, is the smallest and weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh. And not only that, Gideon says he's the smallest and weakest in his family. <sup>16</sup> The Lord answered, **"I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."**<sup>17</sup> Gideon replied, **"If now I have found favour in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me."** Judges 16:16-17.

Now he's saying I am too small and I need a sign. So, he asks for a sign, and he gets it. This wasn't enough he wanted more! <sup>18</sup> **Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you."** And the Lord said, **"I will wait until you return."**<sup>19</sup> Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

**<sup>20</sup> The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And Gideon did so. <sup>21</sup> Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the Lord disappeared. Judges 6:18-21.**

So, there was his sign! But if you know anything about his story, you know that he kept needing signs. In fact, here's what happened when the Midianites came and it was time to fight: **<sup>33</sup> Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. <sup>34</sup> Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. <sup>35</sup> He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them. Judges 6:33-35.**

**<sup>36</sup> Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised — <sup>37</sup> 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.” <sup>38</sup> And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. <sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.” Judges 6:36-39**

Throughout the Old Testament, dew is used as an image of God's renewing and life-giving Presence. In Genesis Isaac blesses Jacob, **<sup>28</sup> May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine. Genesis 27:28.** We see this in the following Scriptures too.

**<sup>28</sup> So Israel will live in safety; Jacob will dwell secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew. Deuteronomy 33:28.**

**<sup>3</sup> Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy splendour, your young men will come to you like dew from the morning's womb. Psalm 110:3.**

**<sup>3</sup> It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. Psalm 133:3.**

The prophet Hosea reports that God says he will no longer be angry with Israel but rather, **<sup>5</sup> I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon, he will send down his roots; Hosea 14:5.** So, the coming of the dew was a symbol of the blessing of God. The blessing of fruitfulness and the blessing of nourishment.

Let's turn to the two fleece signs that Gideon asks for. Many Christians use the story of Gideon's fleece as a model for seeking God's will. This is clearly a wrong application of the story. For Gideon, God's will is already known and right in front of him. However, Gideon is not really concerned with discovering God's will. He wants to know if he is going to win, if in fact God will deliver Israel. That's a very different question. Gideon is only going to be obedient if obedience will grant him victory. He has a charismatic experience of God's presence and of the Holy Spirit's energy, but he does not allow this to be written on his

heart. This is a warning to Christians today. A charismatic experience should not just be a unique experience. It should fill you with awe in the God who delivers it and changes you in some way.

Rather than seeking signs via fleeces, we should be content to know God's will for us in every situation every day. <sup>16</sup> **Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Colossians 3:16.** <sup>16</sup> **Rejoice always,** <sup>17</sup> **pray continually,** <sup>18</sup> **give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.** <sup>7</sup> **And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17.**

If these things characterise our lives, the decisions we make will be in accordance with God's will, he will bless us immeasurably with his peace and assurance, and there will be no need to put out fleeces or ask for signs.

So, now we are getting a fuller picture of who Gideon was. He was weak physically and spiritually. Yet, he was who God picked, and who God used. Despite all Gideon's issues, God used him in a mighty way. In fact, with an army of only three hundred men, Gideon defeated the Midianites. He then became the first Judge of Israel, even being known as the warrior judge, known for strength and bravery and faith in God. Obviously, his whole life was a God-thing.

God took Gideon who lacked faith and needed constant reassurance that he could do what God asked of him. Here is what God tried to instil into him. <sup>12</sup> **When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Judges 6:12.**

<sup>14</sup> **The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" Judges 6:14.**

<sup>16</sup> **The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive." Judges 6: 16.**

<sup>33</sup> **Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel.** <sup>34</sup> **Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. Judges 6:33-34.**

Catch the theme? You can do what I have asked you to do. You have strength. You can do great things. That's what God sees in you. That's who he made you to be. That's first. Then God adds, "And I am with you. Whatever weakness you have will be compensated for with my strength." I want to say this morning that both are true for us this morning.

<sup>8</sup> **Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter we are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64:8** <sup>10</sup> **For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10.** These verses speak of God's close work with us. As a potter uses his or her hands to mould something beautiful out of a lump of clay, so God wants to mould and shape us after his son Jesus.