

Gideon Who Tested God

Judges Chapters 6-8

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Good morning. I would like to ask you some questions. Have any of you lived as slaves to another country? Have you ever reached a point of desperation because another country has not only conquered you, but also destroyed your crops – taking everything they could lay their hands on? I have! And by the way, my name is Gideon.

My family was the lowest in status of the tribe of Manasseh in Israel – very insignificant. We were poor – not knowing where our next meal would come from.

It was our fault that we were in this condition – not just **my** family, but the whole nation of Israel had turned to idolatry, forsaking the God of Israel who had done so much for us. He delivered us out of slavery in Egypt, helped us conquer the land of Canaan and make it ours. All we had to do was be faithful to God and God would take care of us.

As soon as Israel would forsake God and turn to and worship the false gods in the land, God would send someone to warn us to turn from our wicked ways. But we had ignored them and continued to worship Baal and Asherah and other gods and goddesses in the land. So God would send a pagan king to conquer us until we learned our lesson.

I wish I could say we learned our lesson and stayed true to God, but we didn't learn a thing.

God allowed the Midianite King and his army to enter our land like locusts – destroying our crops all the way to Gaza. For seven years we had to endure their annual marauding armies and taking everything we needed for survival.

Finally our nation had enough. We were desperate – hungry and fearful, hiding in caves trying to eke out a living.

One day I was down at the winepress threshing wheat, out of sight of the Midianites. If they saw what I was doing, they would have taken what little wheat I had. The strangest thing happened to me while I was hiding out there. The angel of the Lord appeared to me and said:

[Judges 6:12] “God is with you, O mighty warrior.”

In the first place, If God was truly with us, why has He turned us over to the Midianites. Why does He have nothing to do with us? Doesn't He **see** the suffering we have had to endure?

In the second place, I am not a warrior. How would I ever save Israel? Look at me. My clan's the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the runt of the litter. You definitely have the wrong man. You need to get a **leader** – not someone insignificant like me.

Well, He didn't give up on me that easily. He told me:

[Judges 6:16] “I'll be with you. Believe me, you'll defeat Midian as one man.”

Call me a skeptic or a doubter, but I wasn't about to try to deliver Israel unless I was absolutely convinced that it was really God who was calling me to this task. I asked God for a sign to **prove** that I was really called to lead Israel. Can you blame me? That's an awesome task and a big responsibility and I did not feel I was adequate for the job. I asked the angel to wait there while I fixed a meal for him.

I killed a young goat [I kid you not], and hurriedly made some unleavened bread. The bread alone took over half a bushel of flour. I put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot and took them out to the shade of the oak tree to serve a sacred meal.

The angel of God surprised me by asking me to place the meat and bread on a rock and to pour the broth on them both. I know this sounds hard to believe, but I was there when it happened. The angel took a stick he was holding and touched the meat and bread with the tip of the stick, and fire came out of the rock and burned up the bread and meat. While it was burning up, the angel slipped away. I **knew** then that I had seen the angel of the Lord face to face and I was scared to death.

God reassured me and told me not to panic, because I would not die. I was so grateful that I made an altar to God on that spot and named it, "God's Peace."

God had another job for me to do. I was to take my father's best seven-year-old bull [It was prime Beef]. Then I was to tear down my father's altar to Baal along with the fertility pole to Asherah beside it. I was to build an altar to God on top of the hill where everyone could see it. Then I took my father's prime bull and offered it there as a sacrifice to God using the wood from the Baal altar and the Asherah fertility pole as kindling for the fire. I had recruited some friends to help me with the task.

I waited until nighttime to do this because I didn't know what my family and the townspeople would say or do to me when they found out.

Just as I expected, there was an uproar in town when they discovered the altar of Baal and the Asherah fertility pole were destroyed and my father's prime bull burning away on the altar I had built to God.

They wondered who had done this – and why. When they discovered I was responsible, they wanted to put me to death.

My father, Joash, stood up to the crowd and asked them how long they were going to fight Baal's battles for him. He suggested that if Baal is **really** a god, why not let him fight his own battles and defend his own altar. The townspeople gave me a new name that day: **Jerub-Baal** because I had torn down the altar of Baal.

Looking around the area to find something I could use to be doubly assured that God was calling me to defeat the Midianites and the Amalekites, I saw a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. So I said to God:

[Judges 6:36-37] "I'm placing this fleece of wool on the threshing floor. Tomorrow morning if dew is only on the fleece and the floor is dry, then I will know you will use me to save Israel as you said."

That's what happened. The next morning when I got up early I took that fleece and wrung out enough dew to fill a bowl with water. So I asked God to be patient with me and give me one more proof.

[Judges 6:39] "This time let the fleece be dry while the dew drenches the ground."

That's what God did that night. The fleece was perfectly dry while the ground was soaked with dew.

So I called for troops to meet me at Mount Gilead. What an outpouring of people to join the army that day. 32,000 answered the call to fight. I was delighted, but God wasn't – which surprised me. I thought He **wanted** us to defeat the Amalekites and the Midianites. But God said the army was too large. If they won the battle, they would claim the victory instead of giving it to God.

I followed God's orders and told the army: "***If anyone is afraid or has any qualms at all to just head home.***"

I wasn't prepared for such a mass exodus. It seemed like the whole army was going to go home – 22,000 left for home and only 10,000 stayed to fight the battle. I was a bit apprehensive about going to war with such a reduced army, but then God said it was still too large. I thought God must be kidding. We would be greatly outnumbered by the opposing armies.

God put me through **another** test – just like I had put God through. I was told to take the remaining men down to the stream and watch how they drink the water. Some put their face down to the stream to drink directly from the flowing water. There were 300 who lapped the water from their cupped hands. God said that those were the men He wanted to fight the battle.

But that was only 300 men. What chance would we have against such large armies on the other side? What kind of odds are those that we would win? But if that's what God wants, and God is fighting with us, we cannot lose.

So I sent all but the 300 men home, but kept their provisions. We set up camp at the top of the mountain. God chose the weapons we were to use: a trumpet, an empty clay jar, and a torch to put in the empty clay jar. I was no military man, but I did not think those were very good weapons to fight against an army armed with swords and spears, horses and camels – but that is what God said to use.

That night I was trying to get some sleep before the battle began. God woke me up and told me to go down to the camp of the enemy if I had any doubts. ***If I had any doubts???*** I had plenty of doubts, so I got up and took Purah, my armor-bearer and we slipped down to where the enemy was camped for the night.

We arrived at a tent on the edge in time to hear two of the soldiers discussing a dream one of them had. He dreamed that a barley loaf tumbled down into the Midianite camp and hit it so hard that it collapsed. The tent fell. He asked his friend what the dream meant.

[Judges 6:14] "This has to be the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite! God has turned Midian – the whole camp – over to him."

Gideon prayed, thanking God for the answer, then whispered to his armor-bearer, "Let's go. God has just given us the Midianite army!"

We returned to the camp I had set up and called the 300 men together. After passing out their “weapons” – trumpets, empty clay jars, and torches – and told them to wait until they heard me blow my trumpet. That would be their signal to blow their trumpets, smash the clay jars, hold up their torches, and yell, “A sword for God and for Gideon.”

We surrounded the camp and I gave the signal. It so frightened the Midianite army and put them in such turmoil, that they were aiming their swords at each other.

So God gave us the victory that night. The people of Israel were so grateful that they wanted to make me a king. I told them just to let God be their king.

I still cannot believe that God would use an insignificant man from an insignificant clan – a man with **no** military experience, to bring deliverance from the Midianites after seven years of oppression.

If God could use **me**, he can also use **you** – if you will listen to Him and obey.