



# Gideon

## A Good Example of God's Goodness

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## Overview

### GIDEON, A GOOD EXAMPLE OF GOD'S GUIDANCE

His story is told in Judges 6-8. He is also mentioned in Hebrews 11:32.

Most of us want to know God's plan for our lives, but we're not always sure how to find it.

One common misunderstanding is the idea that God's guidance will come to us out of the blue, that it has nothing to do with what we're doing now. But if we're always looking around for God's next assignment, we run the risk of ruining whatever we're working on right now.

Fortunately, the Bible points to a kind of guidance that does not put our current projects in jeopardy. In the Bible's descriptions of how God guided many people, we can see that often God's call came while people were completely immersed in the challenge of the moment. A good example of this kind of guidance is seen in Gideon's life.

Gideon had a limited vision, but he was committed to it. His challenge was to obtain food for his family even though hostile invaders were making the growing, gathering, and preparation of the food almost impossible.

Gideon was resourceful. He put a winepress to double duty by turning it into a sunken threshing floor. It lacked ventilation to blow the chaff away, but at least it was hidden from the Midianites. Gideon was working in his threshing floor when God sent him a messenger with a challenge.

Gideon was surprised by what God told him to do. He did not want to jump into a task for which he was ill prepared. The angel had to overcome three objections before Gideon was convinced: (1) Gideon's feelings of responsibility for his family's welfare, (2) his doubts about the call itself, and (3) his feelings of inadequacy for the job. Once Gideon was convinced, however, he obeyed with zest, resourcefulness, and speed. He dedicated those personality traits to God, with whom he was now personally acquainted.

## **Call of Gideon, by an angel**

### **Judges 6:11-14**

Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the oak tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash had been threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites.

The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

"Sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The Lord brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites."

Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

The Old Testament records several appearances of the angel of the Lord: Genesis 16:7; Genesis 22:11; Genesis 31:11; Exodus 3:2; Exodus 14:19; Judges 2:1; Judges 13:3; Zech. 3:1-6. It is not known whether the same angel appeared in each case.

The angel mentioned here appears to be separate from God in one place (Judges 6:12) and yet the same as God in another place (Judges 6:14). This has led some to believe that the angel was a special appearance of Jesus Christ prior to his mission on earth as recorded in the New Testament.

It is also possible that as a special messenger from God, the angel had authority to speak for God. In either case, God sent a special messenger to deliver an important message to Gideon.

Threshing was the process of separating the grains of wheat from the useless outer shell called chaff.

This was normally done in a large area, often on a hill, where the wind could blow away the lighter chaff when the farmer tossed the beaten wheat into the air.

If Gideon had done this, however, he would have been an easy target for the bands of raiders who were overrunning the land.

Therefore, he was forced to thresh his wheat in a winepress, a pit that was probably hidden from view and that would not be suspected as a place to find a farmer's crops.

### **Gideon's excuses**

#### **Judges 6:15**

"But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"

I will be with you," God told Gideon, and God promised to give him the strength he needed to overcome the opposition. In spite of this clear promise for strength, Gideon made excuses. Seeing only his limitations and weaknesses, he failed to see how God could work through him.

### **Promises of the Lord to**

#### **Judges 6:16**

The Lord said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man."

Like Gideon, we are called to serve God in specific ways. Although God promises us the tools and strength we need, we often make excuses. But reminding God of our limitations only implies that he does not know all about us or that he has made a mistake in evaluating our character. Don't spend time making excuses. Instead spend it doing what God wants.

### **Angel attests the call to, by miracle**

#### **Judges 6:21-24**

Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and bread with the staff in his hand, and fire flamed up from the rock and consumed all he had brought. And the angel of the Lord disappeared.

When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he cried out, "Sovereign Lord, I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!"

"It is all right," the Lord replied. "Do not be afraid. You will not die." And Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and named it "The Lord Is Peace." The altar remains in Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer to this day.

Why was Gideon afraid of seeing an angel? The Israelites believed that no one could see God and live (see God's words to Moses in Exodus 33:20). Evidently Gideon thought this also applied to angels.

### **He destroys the altar of Baal, and builds one to the Lord**

#### **Judges 6:25-27**

That night the Lord said to Gideon, "Take the second best bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it.

Then build an altar to the Lord your God here on this hill, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."

27] So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord had commanded. But he did it at night because he was afraid of the other members of his father's household and the people of the town. He knew what would happen if they found out who had done it.

## His prayer tests

### Judges 6:36-40

Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel as you promised, prove it to me in this way. I will put some wool on the threshing floor tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to help me rescue Israel as you promised."

And it happened just that way. When Gideon got up the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one more request. This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet with dew."

So that night God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground was covered with dew.

Was Gideon testing God, or was he simply asking God for more encouragement? In either case, though his motive was right (to obey God and defeat the enemy), his method was less than ideal.

Gideon seems to have known that his requests might displease God (Judges 6:39), and yet he demanded two miracles (Judges 6:37, 39) even after witnessing the miraculous fire from the rock (Judges 6:21).

It is true that to make good decisions, we need facts. Gideon had all the facts, but still he hesitated. He delayed obeying God because he wanted even more proof.

Demanding extra signs was an indication of unbelief. Fear often makes us wait for more confirmation when we should be taking action. Visible signs are unnecessary if they only confirm what we already know is true.

Today the greatest means of God's guidance is his Word, the Bible. Unlike Gideon, we have God's complete, revealed Word. If you want to have more of God's guidance, don't ask for signs; study the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

After seeing the miracle of the wet fleece, why did Gideon ask for another miracle?

Perhaps he thought the results of the first test could have happened naturally. A thick fleece could retain moisture long after the sun had dried the surrounding ground. “Putting out fleeces” is a poor decision-making method. Those who do this put limitations on God. They ask him to fit their expectations.

The results of such experiments are usually inconclusive and thus fail to make us any more confident about our choices. Don’t let a “fleece” become a substitute for God’s wisdom that comes through Bible study and prayer.

### **Leads an army against and defeats the Midianites**

#### **Judges 6:33-35**

Soon afterward the armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east formed an alliance against Israel and crossed the Jordan, camping in the valley of Jezreel.

Then the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon. He blew a ram's horn as a call to arms, and the men of the clan of Abiezer came to him.

He also sent messengers throughout Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, summoning their warriors, and all of them responded.

### **Gideon's Army Reduced**

#### **Judges 7:1-8**

God provides that the praise of victory may be wholly to himself, by appointing only three hundred men to be employed. Activity and prudence go with dependence upon God for help in our lawful undertakings. When the Lord sees that men would overlook him, and through unbelief, would shrink from perilous services, or that through pride they would vaunt themselves against him, he will set them aside, and do his work by other instruments.

Many, for deserting the cause and escaping the cross, will find pretences. But though a religious society may thus be made fewer in numbers, yet it will gain as to purity, and may expect an increased blessing from the Lord.

God chooses to employ such as are not only well affected, but zealously affected in a good thing. They grudged not at the liberty of the others who were dismissed. In doing the duties required by God, we must not regard the forwardness or backwardness of others, nor what they do, but what God looks for at our hands.

He is a rare person who can endure that others should excel him in gifts or blessings, or in liberty; so that we may say, it is by the special grace of God that we regard what God says to us, and not look to men what they do.

### **Gideon Is Encouraged**

#### **Judges 7:9-15**

The dream seemed to have little meaning in it; but the interpretation evidently proved the whole to be from the Lord, and discovered that the name of Gideon had filled the Midianites with terror. Gideon took this as a sure pledge of success; without delay he worshipped and praised God, and returned with confidence to his three hundred men.

Wherever we are, we may speak to God, and worship him. God must have the praise of that which encourages our faith. And his providence must be acknowledged in events, though small and seemingly accidental.

## **The Defeat of the Midianites**

### **Judges 7:16-22**

This method of defeating the Midianites may be alluded to, as exemplifying the destruction of the devil's kingdom in the world, by the preaching of the everlasting gospel, the sounding that trumpet, and the holding forth that light out of earthen vessels, for such are the ministers of the gospel, 2Co 4:6, 7.

God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, a barley-cake to overthrow the tents of Midian that the excellency of the power might be of God only.

The gospel is a sword, not in the hand, but in the mouth: the sword of the Lord and of Gideon; of God and Jesus Christ, of Him that sits on the throne and the Lamb.

The wicked are often led to avenge the cause of God upon each other, under the power of their delusions, and the fury of their passions.

See also how God often makes the enemies of the church instruments to destroy one another; it is a pity that the church's friends should ever act like them.

## **The Ephraimites Take Oreb and Zeeb**

### **Judges 7:23-25**

Two chief commanders of the host of Midian were taken and slain by the men of Ephraim. It were to be wished that we all did as these did, and that where help is needed, that it were willingly and readily performed by another.

And that if there were any excellent and profitable matter begun, we were willing to have fellow-labourers to the finishing and perfecting the same, and not, as often, hinder one another.

## **Gideon pursues the enemy.**

### **Gideon Pacifies the Ephraimites**

#### **Judges 8:1-3**

Those who will not attempt or venture anything in the cause of God, will be the most ready to censure and quarrel with such as are of a more zealous and enterprising spirit.

And those who are the most backward to difficult services, will be the most angry not to have the credit of them. Gideon stands here as a great example of self-denial; and shows us that envy is best removed by humility.

The Ephraimites had given vent to their passion in very wrong freedom of speech, a certain sign of a weak cause: reason runs low when chiding flies high.

## **Succoth and Penuel Refuse to Relieve Gideon**

#### **Judges 8:4-12**

Gideon's men were faint, yet pursuing; fatigued with what they had done, yet eager to do more against their enemies. It is many a time the true Christian's case, fainting, and yet pursuing. The world knows but little of the persevering and successful struggle the real believer maintains with his sinful heart. But he betakes himself to that Divine strength, in the faith of which he began his conflict, and by the supply of which alone he can finish it in triumph.

## **Succoth and Penuel Punished**

#### **Judges 8:13-17**

The active servants of the Lord meet with more dangerous opposition from false professors than from open enemies; but they must not care for the behaviour of those who are Israelites in name, but Midianites in heart.

They must pursue the enemies of their souls, and of the cause of God, though they are ready to faint through inward conflicts and outward hardships.

And they shall be enabled to persevere. The less men help, and the more they seek to hinder, the more will the Lord assist. Gideon's warning being slighted, the punishment was just. Many are taught with the briars and thorns of affliction, who would not learn otherwise.

### **Gideon Avenges His Brethren**

#### **Judges 8:18-21**

The kings of Midian must be reckoned with. As they confessed themselves guilty of murder, Gideon acted as the avenger of blood, being the next of kin to the persons slain.

Little did they think to have heard of this so long after; but murder seldom goes unpunished in this life. Sins long forgotten by man, must be accounted for to God.

What poor consolation in death from the hope of suffering less pain, and of dying with less disgrace than some others! Yet many are more anxious on these accounts, than concerning the future judgment, and what will follow.

### **Gideon Declines the Government, but Given Occasion for Idolatry**

#### **Judges 8:22-28**

Gideon refused the government the people offered him. No good man can be pleased with any honour done to him, which belongs only to God. Gideon thought to keep up the remembrance of this victory by an ephod, made of the choicest of the spoils.

But probably this ephod had, as usual, a teraphim annexed to it, and Gideon intended this for an oracle to be consulted. Many are led into false ways by one false step of a good man.

It became a snare to Gideon himself, and it proved the ruin of the family. How soon will ornaments that feed the lust of the eye, and form the pride of life, as well as tend to the indulgences of the flesh, bring shame on those who are fond of them!

### **Gideon's Death, Israel's Ingratitude**

#### **2 Kings 8:29-35**

As soon as Gideon was dead, who kept the people to the worship of the God of Israel, they found themselves under no restraint; and then they went after Baalim, and showed no kindness to the family of Gideon.

No wonder if those who forget their God, forget their friends. Yet conscious of our own ingratitude to the Lord, and observing that of mankind in general, we should learn to be patient under any unkind returns we meet with for our poor services, and resolve, after the Divine example, not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.

When they reached Succoth, Gideon asked the leaders of the town, "Will you please give my warriors some food? They are very tired. I am chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian."

But the leaders of Succoth replied, "You haven't caught Zebah and Zalmunna yet. Catch them first, and then we will feed your warriors."

So Gideon said, "After the Lord gives me victory over Zebah and Zalmunna, I will return and tear your flesh with the thorns and briars of the wilderness."

From there Gideon went up to Peniel and asked for food, but he got the same answer. So he said to the people of Peniel, "After I return in victory, I will tear down this tower."

By this time Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with a remnant of 15,000 warriors—all that remained of the allied armies of the east—for 120,000 had already been killed.

Gideon circled around by the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah, taking the Midianite army by surprise. Zebah and Zalmunna, the two Midianite kings, fled, but Gideon chased them down and captured all their warriors.

## Faith of Gideon

### **Hebrews 11:32**

Gideon had his weak moments and failures, but he was still God's servant. If you can easily see yourself in the Gideon's weakness, can you also see yourself in being willing to serve? Remember Gideon as a man who obeyed God by giving his attention to the task at hand. Then give your full attention to believing God will prepare you for tomorrow when it comes.

The Old Testament records the lives of the various people who experienced these great victories. Joshua and Deborah conquered kingdoms (the book of Joshua; Judges 4-5).

Nehemiah administered justice (the book of Nehemiah). Daniel was saved from the mouths of lions (Daniel 6). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were kept from harm in the furious flames of a fiery furnace (Daniel 3). Elijah escaped the edge of the swords of evil Queen Jezebel's henchmen (1 Kings 19:2ff).

Hezekiah regained strength after sickness (2 Kings 20). Gideon was powerful in battle (Judges 7). A widow's son was brought back to life by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-37).

We, too, can experience victory through faith in Christ. Our victories over oppressors may be like those of the Old Testament saints, but more likely, our victories will be directly related to the role God wants us to play.

Even though our bodies deteriorate and die, we will live forever because of Christ. In the promised resurrection, even death will be defeated and Christ's victory will be made complete.

### **Lessons from his life:**

- God calls in the middle of our present obedience. As we are faithful, he gives us more responsibility
- God expands and uses the abilities he has already built into us
- God uses us in spite of our limitations and failures

Even those who make great spiritual progress can easily fall into sin if they don't consistently follow God

### **Key verses:**

“‘But Lord,’ Gideon asked, ‘how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’ The LORD answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together’ ” (Judges 6:15-16).

### **To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:**

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

### **References:**

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