

RUF Bible Study – Judges  
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister<sup>1</sup>  
February 13, 2008  
Judges 6 – Gideon Part 1 – Help My Unbelief

*Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord. And Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face. But the Lord said to him, “Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die.” Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord is Peace.  
Judges 6:22-24*

We’ve come to the transitional story in Judges. Gideon marks the place where the downward cycles really start to spiral into the abyss. Gideon and Samson are perhaps the most famous stories in Judges. Most people who have heard of the Bible have a familiarity of Gideon’s fleece (which we’ll talk about in this chapter) and the way God directs Gideon to wage war by winnowing down his army to almost nothing.

My daughter is in kindergarten in a Christian school. She’s doing a Bible overview, which means she brings home coloring sheets with key events on them. She posts them on her wall in her room. I looked last night and Judges gets three entries, two of which come from chapter 6 and the other one from chapter 7: the Israelites hid from the Midianites; Gideon tests God; the Israelites are victorious. As expected (and maybe with relief), no Ehud and no Jael. Kindergarten teachers don’t quite know what to do with these “heroes.”

What about Gideon? Is he a hero? Is he a good guy or a bad guy?

We’ll look at that question over the next few chapters, as his life is unfolded before us. Gideon gets 100 verses in Judges, the most of anyone (Samson has 96). While we practically glossed over the careers of Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon gets fuller exposure, so we’ll take more time with him as well.

Before we dive in, let me ask you: What are your biggest fears? Your first reaction might be some sort of phobia you have – snakes, spiders, the dark, or heights.

What about abluthophobia? Fear of bathing. Or pogonophobia? Fear of beards. Or Linonophobia? Fear of string.

We could go on and on with strange phobias, and I’m not sure those are all real anyway. But we really are afraid of things. I think we’re commonly afraid of being by ourselves (not the same as being introverted) without entertainment; we’re afraid of being left alone; we’re afraid to become needy and a bother to others; we’re afraid to truly be known; and we’re afraid of dying.

Those are natural. But they can paralyze us. We live in a culture of winners – we really do hate losing and losers. The result is a drive and a zeal for performance.

Gideon had real fears too, so I hope we can relate to him and put ourselves in his shoes. He may have been threshing wheat in a cave, but we should be able to see ourselves with the same feelings and emotions as him. He’s not a hero. He’s just a guy. Let’s look at his fears, God’s answer, his fragile faith and his actions.

### ***Gideon’s Fears***

We finished off chapter 5 on a positive note: *And Israel had rest for forty years.* But as per our familiar cycle, we read in the next verse, the first of chapter 6: *The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.*

Again God punished Israel for turning away from him. Our key verse in Judges is the last one: *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was evil in his own eyes. (24:27).* So we’re first tempted to feel sorry for the Israelites, but we then realize they got not only what they deserved but in some sense what they wanted. They worshipped other gods; they bowed down and served the Baals. They accommodated to the culture. So God gave them to the culture. It was an apt and proper judgment.

The Midianites weren’t the same type of oppressors we’ve heard of thus far in Judges. They weren’t establishing kingdoms in Canaan – they were swooping in every so often and taking everything God’s people had done. They were pillaging and looting the land, leaving it empty and used. The author says they were like locusts. So many!

I think of the situation in “A Bug’s Life” when Hopper and his grasshoppers held the ants hostage to work for them.

---

<sup>1</sup> © Doug Serven, 2008 You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 500 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Doug Serven.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2007, website: [www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org).

For this series, I used commentaries on Judges from Block, Wilcock, Redeemer Pres, Davis, Cundall/Morris, Jordan, and listened to sermons from Brandon Barrett, Shaynor Newsome, and Pete Hatton. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

Something like that, but without the animation and talking bugs. We have the same situation here, so many that their people and camels couldn't be counted.

God's people were reduced to hiding in the caves in the mountains. They were afraid, scared for their lives. We can imagine they were starving. They cried out to God for help (v. 6).

It's here we find Gideon. He's threshing wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. He couldn't do his job correctly because he didn't want the Midianites to discover what he was doing and take it away from him. So our first fear we see of Gideon is that of his safety. That's a natural fear, to be sure.

Back in 2001, after the New York City bombing, our country was put on high alert. One of my friends took the warnings seriously. He had a new family and was prone to worry. So he duct-taped his windows in order to prevent any chemical weapons to enter his house. He tried to anthrax-proof his existence. He was afraid.

But we see Gideon's safety isn't his only fear. When God comes and talks to him (which we'll discuss), he reveals something else. He protests his stature and status. In a scene reminiscent of Moses' protests in Exodus 4, Gideon starts to talk about how he's from the weakest tribe, and he's the least in his own family. There is an aspect of this of humility, and also another part of it is truth. But it also is an assessment made out of fear.

Gideon thinks like us – God doesn't work with people like me. I'm from the wrong family. I'm from the wrong kind of people. I'm not good enough. Some of us think that. Or maybe we think the opposite – yes, God does work with people just like me. I'm from a good family. I have good morals. I am a good person. I come from a good suburb, a good school and have good grades. I am good. That is the same type of thinking – just the opposite side of the coin.

We're afraid we won't be good enough. It's another natural fear. We have a vast experience of being treated based on our performance. If you behave correctly, I will love you. If you act up or act out, I will shun you.

In the world's eyes, Gideon is an unlikely candidate for God's work. He's not a winner.

Another fear of Gideon comes from his surroundings. We'll discuss this later, but notice in verse 27: *So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night.* It's not common for the author to make many editorial comments, but here's one for us. Gideon was afraid of his family and the men of the town.

Can you relate to that? What if my faith makes me weird? What if God calls me to do strange things that alienate me from everyone? What if I get too crazy? This claim is lobbed at many people who start to truly walk with Jesus. They get called "Jesus freaks," which is a device of peer pressure to hurt them and change their actions. Parents can wonder what sort of cult you got involved in. When my wife first became a Christian and got involved with The Navigators group on campus, her mom asked her just this thing – are you in a cult? It's okay to believe in Jesus, but when you start to act differently and talk differently, then we begin to wonder if you're okay. Nominal Christianity won't offend anyone. It's just like Baalism mixed with some Yahweh. Just like what Gideon's world was like.

Gideon was afraid of what the people would think when he started following God's commands. Admittedly, this one was pretty dramatic. You most likely won't be asked to do something at the next home football game (you won't), but any time you start to do anything, people are going to react. And you're going to be afraid of that reaction just like Gideon was.

There's one more thing here about Gideon's fear. He was afraid God wasn't with him. In verse 13, Gideon asks, *Please sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?* Here is perhaps Gideon's deepest fear. He had heard of Yahweh. He had heard of Yahweh's great actions in the past – but where was Yahweh now? Was God far away? I think this is the fear of hope. If I hope in God in such a bad situation, won't I just be disappointed? If so, then it's better not to hope at all. That logic is one of fear and distrust. Gideon looks at the facts and concludes – God is surely not with us. In fact he's against us. He doesn't really know God. He only knows about God. When he later sees God and is in the presence of God, he is filled with fear and dread. He expects to die.

So it's a doubled-edged fear. On the one hand, he doesn't really believe in God's power to save. On the other hand, when he does witness God's power, he experiences it in the form of death and judgment.

Friends, we can relate to these fears of Gideon, can't we? We are afraid for our safety. We hide ourselves from evil. We fear the opinions of men. We hide our faith because we don't want to be made fun of or shunned. We're afraid of our status and don't think God could use people like us because we're sinners. We're afraid to do anything too radical for God. We want to fit into what is "normal." And we actually fear God. Where is he? is our first question. We wonder if he even cares. But we also wonder that if he did care, if he'd strike us dead. We know of his holiness and are afraid of him. We wither in the site of a holy God, for we know we are a sinful people. We fear being forgotten, forsaken and stricken, smitten and afflicted by this God, this Yahweh of Judges.

I'd like to respectfully disagree with Franklin Roosevelt who said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself?" Ha. No way. There are a lot of other legitimate things to fear. We're full of them.

### ***God's Answer***

If we can relate to Gideon's fears as a normal guy trying to make it in hard times, then we're ready to hear God's answer to him.

The first part of the answer comes in verse 7. God heard his people's cries so he... sent a prophet. Huh? We're expecting God to send a deliverer. After all, this has been the pattern. God throws us a curveball, and in doing so, reminds us we have to be careful about some of our expectations. He will do what he wills. Commentator Davis says God's action here is like having your car break down, calling the tow truck, and having a philosopher show up. You might be a little confused.

But God sends an unnamed prophet. The prophet gets to it straightaway, proclaiming God's word to his people. He reviews God's track record, especially God's work in Egypt (another connection with Exodus), his gracious character and his salvation for his people. He finishes with a note of judgment: *But you have not obeyed my voice.*

First let's note that God cares about sending prophets. He sent one in Deborah, and he sends another one here. In our day, we're not so sure. We often want action. We want doing. Preaching and preachers have been downgraded in our culture. Churches are being organized based on the collective wisdom of people, farming out the teaching into more of sharing and facilitating in a circle with common leadership. There may be something to that, although I'm not so sure. I think one of the results is a disparaging of the preached word by men trained and qualified to teach. In removing our pulpits and giving more "access" to the Bible, I've seen the time normally allotted for preaching turn into an entertainment event, given by an unqualified man who is a catchy public speaker.

We should beware of this phenomenon. God sends prophets and preachers to his people. This wasn't a message the people loved hearing. They didn't go away feeling good about themselves and God's plan for their lives. They felt their lack of faithfulness when called to repent. Apparently, according to God, this was what they needed. They didn't only need to be saved from their circumstances – they needed to be saved from their idolatry. They had gone after, whored after, other gods. They needed an interpretation of their circumstances and a reminder of the truth. God's answer to their cries was first to lead them to his word and to his truth by his preacher. Romans 10:17 says: *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* We too need to be shown our faults before our holy God. We need to hear good, faithful, Biblical, authoritative preaching so we can see our need of a Savior God.

We have that here in Judges. And what do we expect the result to be? When we get to the end of 6:10 and hear: *But you have not obeyed my voice* what do we think will happen?

I'm expecting judgment. More judgment. More oppressors. More giving them over. God has just issued a proclamation about Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant. They should be punished. They did not obey his voice.

But instead of judgment we get a deliverer. In the very next verse (11), we read of the angel of the Lord appearing to Gideon (who didn't appear to have even been there for the preaching). God was so gracious to his people. He didn't judge them, but he saved them. After verse 6, God didn't do what the people had hoped. He didn't send a savior, but he sent a prophet. But at the end of verse 10, he didn't do what the people had feared. He did send a deliverer, and not the angel of death, which he could have sent.

In the midst of our fear, God does answer. He doesn't always do it as we hope, but he also doesn't do it as we fear. He often doesn't immediately save us from our dire circumstances because he wants us to learn from them, interpret them and see his work in them.

How should we apply this point? Put yourself under a good preaching ministry. You should sit under a man who can correctly interpret and apply the Scriptures. There should be plenty of times when you hear hard things about your life, so you can see you need a new, better, more accurate understanding of God's ways and his works.

But while you sit under this sort of Biblical, pastoral exposition, take care to hear God's graciousness to his people. He does send a savior. Listen for that deliverer and take note of his presence.

### ***Gideon's Fragile Faith***

We've looked at Gideon's fear and God's first answer. Now let's look more at Gideon and God's interaction with each other and see how Gideon's fragile faith is handled.

This angel of the Lord shows up, which gets Gideon's attention. He greets him: *The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.* That seems a little off considering Gideon is hiding from the Midianites and hasn't done anything courageous. But God sees into a man, not just what he is. This is prophetic in a sense, but with a touch of present-tense irony.

Gideon knows he's in the presence of something, and it's something spiritual and different. He respects that. He asks about Yahweh's work and his apparent absence from things.

In verse 14, the Lord answered (did you notice we switched from the angel of the Lord to just "the Lord"? ) with a commissioning speech for Gideon. The Lord is sending Gideon to save Israel from the hand of Midian.

Gideon protests, as we've already seen. Not me. I'm the least of the family that's the least of the tribe that's of the least of the people.

God says, *"I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."* God gives his personal promise. I'm reading a book called *The Commanders* which is about the George Bush administration and the Pentagon in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At one point, Bush gives his personal assurance to the Saudi Arabian government that he won't let it be attacked by Saddam Hussein – everyone's eyebrows raise because Bush stopped speaking in politician-ese and gave a personal pledge. That meant more than anything else. God gives his personal pledge here. Our eyebrows should rise. "Basically, God has nothing else or more to offer you. You can go through a lot with that promise. It does not answer your questions about details.

It only provides the essential. Nothing about when or how or where or why. Only about what, or better, the Who. ‘But I will be with you.’ And that is enough.”<sup>2</sup>

But that isn’t enough for Gideon. His faith is fragile. He doesn’t really know this Yahweh too well. So he wants some signs, some proof. He’s like a good Missourian – I won’t believe you until you Show Me.

So Gideon gets busy. He does what he knows to do, and he prepares a meal fit for a king. An ephaph of flour is a lot, like 35-40 pounds. This is a huge loaf of bread. The kill a young goat in this situation would be a massive sacrifice for him and his family. He totally goes for it out of respect for this angel, for this godlike person.

He prepares the meal and sets it up under the tree like a generous offering. And what does God do? He meets with him and eats with him. He consumes the meal. Sure, it was in dramatic fashion with flames. It makes me think of the very cool flaming onion trick when you go to a Japanese steakhouse. But you’re there eating together when that happens. The food was consumed. God ate with Gideon.

Finally, the scales fall off of Gideon’s eyes and “*Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord.*” What is Gideon’s response? Gideon is not comfortable with this. He doesn’t say, “Awesome! Angel of the Lord, let’s go hang out, play some Xbox and eat some kebabs down at Outback. I can introduce you to my friends and it would be super cool if you could do the fire trick for them as well. Let’s go. I’ll bet you could really jam at Guitar Hero.” Gideon is freaked out. He knows now he is in the presence of a real God, and that means he should die. *Alas! O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.* The implication here is I have seen the Lord face to face and I’m a goner. That’s what people’s reactions are when they are in the presence of God. Fear. They see the holiness of God, and how they don’t stack up, and they know they should die on the spot. “This sort of talk [v. 22] is strange to us, because we have no real sense of the terror and awesomeness of God, for we think intimacy with God is an unalienable right rather than an indescribable gift. There is nothing amazing about grace as long as there is nothing fearful about holiness.”<sup>3</sup>

We’re don’t like it, but we’re actually used to this. It’s our common experience, though certainly we don’t see it quite as dramatically. It’s one of our fears, but it’s so normal we don’t think about it any more. When you are in a relationship, you hide your faults from the other person. If you show too many faults, what will happen – he’ll turn away. She’ll reject you. We see it all the time. If you’re not good enough, you don’t make the team. If you can’t perform, you won’t be on stage. If you don’t keep up your grades, you lose your scholarship. It’s the way of the world. It was the way of Baal too. Any god like this is exacting.

But God doesn’t kill him. He says another word: Peace. *The Lord said to him, ‘Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die.’* God gave peace to Gideon, and Gideon responded by erecting an altar, calling it The Lord of Peace.

So here we have a holy God who hates and condemns sin. He knows Gideon is a sinner. But he doesn’t kill him. Instead he gives him peace. What gives? Has Yahweh gone soft on crime?

The only answer is that we have a different sort of God here. He isn’t like our normal experience. He isn’t like Baal. He does demand perfection, but he also gives grace. We see this, if you’re paying attention, in Jesus Christ. God consumed Jesus’ sacrifice in payment for ours. Jesus was forgotten and forsaken so we could be restored. We don’t have to fear separation from God because Jesus was already separated. Jesus’ work on the cross, the work of judgment and condemnation made sure you could have peace.

After all, isn’t that what was said of Jesus in Luke 2: 8 *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. 10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

Peace. Fear not! Glory to God in the highest! Peace among those with whom he is pleased.

There is a rest here. A rest from performance. Gideon was so worried God wouldn’t accept him because of who he was. He was a loser. He was a nobody. But God says, “I delight in working with nobodies and losers. In fact, this is just who I do work with.” Jesus Christ came to save sinners. He didn’t come for winners. He didn’t come for achievers or overachievers. He came for screw-ups like you and me and Gideon. And that’s only possible if Jesus is real, if Jesus took our place. Otherwise, God cannot be with us. But with Jesus, God is with us. He is Immanuel, God with us.

This then is the gospel. I want you to see that the work is God’s. The people did cry out, yes. But God sent first his prophet and then his angel to Gideon prior to any work or any awareness even on Gideon’s part. When he ought to destroy – he delivers. When he ought to shatter – he saves. We are lifeless. We are helpless. We are hopeless. But God still saves.

This is Ephesians 2:1-5: *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by*

---

<sup>2</sup> Davis, 95

<sup>3</sup> Davis, 97

*nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—*

That is glorious news! That is the gospel. Your fears of rejection are well-founded in the world, but are dealt with in Jesus. However sinful you are, God's grace is for you. "On the one hand, in ourselves, we are sinful and lost, but in Christ we are accepted and loved. If we ever forget one or the other, we fall into serious trouble. If we forget our sinfulness, we become over-confident, unloving, bad listeners, judgmental, undisciplined in prayer. If we forget our acceptance and lovedness, we become anxious, guilty, driven and so on."<sup>4</sup>

Whatever you have done this week, this month, this life – there is redemption for just the kind of person you are. You cannot be too far gone. You cannot be too far lost. You cannot be any deader than dead – but there is life! There is peace with God, shalom!, through the God of Peace. Your insecurities can be answered by God's work with people just like you.

### ***Gideon's Actions***

But that isn't the end of the story, is it? The chapter doesn't end at verse 24 with this altar of the Lord. God's grace always leads to some kind of action. And it's here we see Gideon's further fragile faith. We'd like to think that Gideon gets this awesome sign of God and he's emboldened for life. Not so.

God tells him to do something really hard, scary and symbolic. He's to pull down the altar of Baal, cut down the Asherah poll, build another altar to Yahweh and then sacrifice the bull on the altar.

Yikes. This is just the sort of thing we're afraid of. But, having been in the presence of God and seeing his power and his love, Gideon decides to do it.

We see some hints here into the life of Gideon. The first glimpse into his life comes from the fact that he is able to recruit 10 men of his servants to help him do this (v. 27). This means he's not too bad off. His family comes from some money. He's living on the West Side in the big houses.

The next thing we see is that this Baal hotspot is administered or sponsored by his own father (v. 25). Think about this. Gideon's knew *of* Yahweh. And his father worshipped Baal. This fits into our understanding of Baal worship. Baal was a tolerant god. You could worship Baal *and* anything else you wanted. Yahweh could be included. You just had to have Baal and his consort Asherah in there somewhere.

We've talked before about how this Baal worship is the worship of something in the natural world. It's not wrong in and of itself, but it's the exaggeration of importance that turns it into an idol. There's nothing wrong with money. But when you enlarge it, when you make a statue of it (in your heart) and then worship it, now it's an idol. So you can have idols of \$100 bills, of a huge penis, of a security blanket, of a massive YES! (for acceptance), of maybe a box (for control). Asherah was celebrated with exaggerated female sexual parts. We wouldn't be too far off with some of our fanciful statue in there up on the mountain too.

Professor Stephen Prothero conducts an interesting "experiment" with one of his religion classes at Boston University. Each semester, he divides the class into groups and has them create and promote their own new religions. In an article in USA TODAY on February 4, 2008, he writes about his observations. Dessertism tantalizes with the stomach as the way to the soul. The Congregation of Wisdom honors Jeopardy! winners. Facebookismianity mixes fun and faith, as does Euphorianity. Some students promote less stress and more sleep with Sertatism and ZZZ. Zen Boozism promotes alcohol as a social lubricant but promotes moderation of course. Prothero writes, "They do not mix faith with dogma. My students are careful — exceedingly careful — not to tell one another what to believe, or even what to do. Above all, they want to be tolerant and non-judgmental. Most of the religions my students developed were fully compatible with other religions. They made few demands, either intellectually or morally. Repeatedly, their founders stress that you can join their religion without leaving Catholicism or Judaism or Islam behind."

And he concludes, "Yes, the religions that students conjure up in my courses tend toward vagueness and relativism. Often they seek to entertain as much as to enlighten. But because they are invented rather than inherited, these religious creations provide a glimpse into the concerns and convictions, hopes and fears of young Americans, who are slouching not toward Bethlehem or even atheism, but toward new ways of being religious — innovative ways that ancient religions ignore at their peril."<sup>5</sup>

These are our religions. These are our idols. Most of us aren't so bold as to create a whole new religion. But we do mix in ZZZ with Christianity. We mix in Zen Boozim or Euphorianity. We'll take some 4.0 GPA, add some Success and then feel good with BodyGoodness or Winning Isn't Everything It's the Only Things along with Jesus.

We like to think of people of that day and age as sort of stupid. They worshipped poles and idols of wood. We're much smarter than that. But are we? Or were they really more honest? "The gods have not changed, for human nature has not changed, and these gods are the gods that humanity regularly recreates for itself. What does it want? If it is modest, security and comfort and reasonable enjoyment; if ambitious, power and wealth and unbridled self-indulgence. In every age there are

---

<sup>4</sup> *Living in a Pluralistic Society*, 48

<sup>5</sup> Prothero, Stephen. "Is Religion Losing the Millennial Generation?" USA Today, 8 February. 2008.

forces at work which promise to meet our desires – political, programmes, economic theories, philosophical movements, entertainment industries – all having one feature in common: they are big enough to do things for us that we cannot do for ourselves, yet at the same time amenable to our manipulating them so as to get from them what we want.”<sup>6</sup>

God tells Gideon, out of a response of his grace, to tear down the worship centers. While Baal made be tolerant, Yahweh isn't. The Lordship of Christ isn't optional – it is demanded. The person who saves you owns you. That is a common maxim and understanding, and it's true for God as well.

Gideon and his people were being oppressed by the Midianites. But first God asked him to take care of the enemy within. “The first and preeminent thing the Church must do is not defeat her enemies, but break the idols of her heart. When Baal is gone, and the altar of the Lord is renewed, the enemies will fall rapidly enough.”<sup>7</sup>

There had to be transformation within his own heart and life before he expected and exacted transformation on the outside. Do you see that? “When fellowship with God is restored, reformation must begin immediately, and it begins at home and in the home town.”<sup>8</sup>

Gideon did it, albeit reluctantly. He went and tore down his own father's worship house, a place he must have visited frequently and recently. He did it at night, out of more fear. But he did it. Davis writes. “Obedience was essential and heroism optional.”<sup>9</sup>

A fracas ensues, in which Gideon's dad Joash defends his son and tells the people that Baal can fend for himself if he's so real. True enough, but this was just what Gideon had feared. Gideon is spared though, and then renamed Jerubbaal, which we're told means “Let Baal contend against him.” Not the best nickname of all time.

Our next scene shows the Spirit of the Lord coming down on Gideon, and his people respond to his trumpet call. He gathers an army to fight against the Midianites.

And then right before this big battle, Gideon lays out his famous “test” of God. He wants to know again if God will be with him, so he constructs the fleece test. If God is real, then the fleece will be wet with the ground around it dry. Realizing wool would naturally soak up whatever moisture is around, Gideon goes another round, but this time raises the stakes by asking the ground to be wet but the fleece to be dry.

Amazingly to us, God fulfills both of these requests, thereby assuring Gideon he is real, he is personal and he is in control in a real and personal way. As commentator Jordan writes, ““God is a Person, our relationship with him is personal, He is personally interested in every atom of the universe, He governs all things by His personal actions, we are surrounded by angels, we can ask and He will answer.”<sup>10</sup>

It's easy to bag on Gideon for this, and commentators often do. But we have to remember Gideon didn't have a Bible, didn't have an operating church, and he didn't have a clue as to who God really was. He had been raised in a syncretistic home where God was just one of many gods. He hadn't been a Christian for long. He didn't know God. So he asked for signs. We can understand that. “Gideon was seeking to understand the nature of God. We have to remember that he did not have the Bible, nor many of the ‘means of grace’ that we have now (Word, prayer, the sacraments, Christian fellowship). He was very specifically addressing the places where his faith was weak and uninformed.”<sup>11</sup>

Let's go back to the tearing down of the Baals first, and then we'll return to this point of the fleece. Gideon had to do something. To show his devotion to Yahweh, he had to tear down the altars to his other gods, the gods of his father and culture.

So should you. God is a jealous lover, as he should be. He will not stand being cheated on. He hates infidelity. He calls it “whoring around.” So when you are confronted with this, and when you turn away – then you have to cut things off with your other lover. You can't say, “Yes, God, I love you,” and still cheat on him on the side. That's wrong. Of course, the testimony is that we're all in danger of this, and we all fight this battle. Yes. But we need to change. We have to change.

How do we change? Your first thought might be to go into your cd stash (if students still have these) and wipe out all of your “secular” cds. You might wipe off all your Beyonce or Eminem or Britany Spears off of your iTunes. These are Satanic, you think. Burn the bad books. No more R-rated movies!

And some of you might need to do that. You should install >>Right Now Today!!<< a porn block on your computer and start to deal with your pornography addiction or fascination if you have one.<sup>12</sup>

But ditching your music or burning your books are really the easy stuff. Much harder is to deal with the idol of what people think of you. Maybe you should stop going to the tanning salon. Why do you go anyway? For your health? Right.

Maybe you should stop serving the idol of performance. You can never, ever do enough. That is the culture of winning. I minister at the University of Oklahoma. There is a strong, strong winner attitude here. I was having lunch with a long-time Sooner today who graduated many years ago. He said he remembers idolizing OU football. He was on cloud nine

---

<sup>6</sup> Wilcock, 80

<sup>7</sup> Jordan, 126

<sup>8</sup> Jordan, 123

<sup>9</sup> Davis, 98

<sup>10</sup> Jordan, 131

<sup>11</sup> *Living in a Pluralistic Society*, 50

<sup>12</sup> netmop.com, Intego Solutions Content Barrier, settingcaptivesfree.com

when OU won and despondent when they lost. One of the best and worst things that happened to OU football coach Bob Stoops was when he won the national championship in only his second season in 2000. By all accounts, he has had much better teams than that one. And yet, every season since then has been a disappointment. So it goes when you serve the culture of winning. It is never satisfied. I told him I thought God loved Baylor football better.

Just a week ago, a story came out regarding a high school senior football player. He wanted to play Division I football so badly that he concocted the lie that he was going to sign to play for a major football team. He had a signing party, and placed two baseball caps on the table. He put on the University of California cap, signifying his choice. People went crazy. The only problem was – they weren't even recruiting him. The façade came tumbling down soon enough. How could he have thought he could keep up the ruse? Surely it couldn't last very long. But again the culture of winning is powerful; it's a drug, and one that an addict has to have.

So to pull down that Baal tower means to embrace the gospel. The gospel is for losers. We have to identify as losers, love losers, and see ourselves as losers. God loves losers. God loves us. Commentator Wilcock writes, "The central theme of these chapters is that God will work out his purposes in those who truly are helpless."<sup>13</sup> And: "The message of Gideon clearly has something to do with the weakness of God's people and the apparently overwhelming strength of the enemy, and with God's methods of perfecting his own strength in weakness."<sup>14</sup>

Are you weak today? Are you a loser? Are you afraid? Gideon was a loser. He was a nobody. He was afraid. Can you relate to him? Is there somewhere in your life at least where you can see yourself as a loser? Do you hide that part of you? I want you to acknowledge that part, and see that God is there. He will ask you to do some hard things, but he is with you along the way.

And then can you see that Gideon, even after he has experienced God this way, still is afraid? Aren't you just like that? Even after you have seen God at work, don't you still wonder if he is there, if he'll still come through? "The root cause of all our problems is 'unbelief.' The reason we have the enemies around us ('Midianites') is because of the enemies among us ('idols'). But the reason we have idols is because deep down we don't trust God. The serpent suggest we couldn't trust god and that is what we have believed ever since. The real reason we don't worship him fully is because we are afraid that, if we give ourselves to him utterly and make him the supreme desire of our hearts, he will let us down."<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes we think that if we trust in God once, then we'll never doubt again. If we agree with that paradigm of the perfect, faithful follower, then we get extremely discouraged when we doubt. We think Gideon was The Man. But he wasn't. He doubted, just like we do. He asked for a sign. "We should be slower to critique trembling Gideons. 'God says it; I believe it; that settles it' may be snazzy bumper-sticker theology, but it doesn't always neatly cover the struggles of believing experience."<sup>16</sup>

You may do the same. But the difference is this – you have more signs than Gideon does. When you doubt, then you are allowed to ask for signs, but you have to go where the signs are and that's in church. You should go and hear the Word faithfully preached. You should go and hear about God's works with his people. You should go and sing the songs that recount God's works and call us to respond to him. And we should go and see the sign and seal he has given – which is the picture of the covenant meal where he declared peace for his people in the Lord's Supper. His death for your death. His life for your life. His personal working in the world. His personal dealing with his people. Immanuel. God with us.

You see that in the Lord's Supper. It's his fleece for you. You can see it every week, and your weak, fearful faith can be strengthened. You don't have to come to him with your performance, but instead bring to him your very weakness. You don't have to have it all together and be a winner. You can be loved even in your failures.

That's what the gospel is. Gideon was a sinner and lost, but he was also accepted and loved. Gideon was afraid. You aren't hiding in a cave, and yet you have things you do hide from the world out of fear. God brings out those fears. He deals with idols and Midionites in our lives.

Because of this, we must first deal with the enemies within our own lives before we go to the enemies on the outside. I believe. Help my unbelief. That was Gideon's prayer. This prophet of the Lord and this angel of the Lord were Jesus. He brings us peace as he makes war.

### Help My Unbelief

*I know the Lord is nigh, And would but cannot pray, For Satan meets me when I try,  
And frights my soul away. And frights my soul away.*

*I would but can't repent, Though I endeavor oft; This stony heart can ne'er relent*

---

<sup>13</sup> Wilcock, 79

<sup>14</sup> Wilcock, 79-80

<sup>15</sup> *Living in a Pluralistic Society*, 49-50

<sup>16</sup> Davis, 99

*Till Jesus makes it soft. Till Jesus make it soft.*

Help my unbelief. Help my unbelief. Help my unbelief. My help must come from Thee.

*I would but cannot love, Though wooed by love divine; No arguments have power to move  
A soul as base as mine. A soul so base as mine.*

*I would but cannot rest, In God's most holy will; I know what He appoints is best,  
And murmur at it still. I murmur at it still.<sup>17</sup>*

---

<sup>17</sup> Taken from the Gadsby Hymnal #278 Words: John Newton, 1725-1807.