



BY FAITH

MAY 24 - AUG 2

(8) "Gideon"

HIGHLIGHT: *Hebrews 11:32; selected verses from Judges 6—8*

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

Hebrews 11:32 NLT

32 How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon....

Judges 6 NLT

vv.11-16

11 Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. **12** The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

13 "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."

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

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!"

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."

vv.17-21

17 Gideon replied, "If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. **18** Don't go away until I come back and bring my offering to you."

He answered, "I will stay here until you return."

19 Gideon hurried home. He cooked a young goat, and with a basket of flour he baked some bread without yeast. Then, carrying the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, he brought them out and presented them to the angel, who was under the great tree.

20 The angel of God said to him, "Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock, and pour the broth over it." And Gideon did as he was told. **21** Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and bread with the tip of 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.

vv.28-32

28 Early the next morning, as the people of the town began to stir, someone discovered that the altar of Baal had been broken down and that the Asherah pole beside it had been cut down. In their place a new altar had been built, and on it were the remains of the bull that had been sacrificed. **29** The people said to each other, "Who did this?" And after asking around and making a careful search, they learned that it was Gideon, the son of Joash.

30 "Bring out your son," the men of the town demanded of Joash. "He must die for destroying the altar of Baal and for cutting down the Asherah pole."

31 But Joash shouted to the mob that confronted him, "Why are you defending Baal? Will you argue his case? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If Baal truly is a god, let him defend himself and destroy the one who broke down his altar!" **32** From then on Gideon was called Jerub-baal, which means "Let Baal defend himself," because he broke down Baal's altar.

Judges 7 NLT

vv.1-2

So Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon) and his army got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The armies of Midian were camped north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. **2** The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength.

vv.7-15

7 The Lord told Gideon, "With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home." **8** So Gideon collected the provisions and rams' horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the 300 men with him.

The Midianite camp was in the valley just below Gideon. **9** That night the Lord said, "Get up! Go down into the Midianite camp, for I have given you victory over them! **10** But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah. **11** Listen to what the Midianites are saying, and you will be greatly encouraged. Then you will be eager to attack."

So Gideon took Purah and went down to the edge of the enemy camp. **12** The armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east had settled in the valley like a swarm of locusts. Their camels were like grains of sand on the seashore—too many to count! **13** Gideon crept up just as a man was telling his companion about a dream. The man said, “I had this dream, and in my dream a loaf of barley bread came tumbling down into the Midianite camp. It hit a tent, turned it over, and knocked it flat!”

14 His companion answered, “Your dream can mean only one thing—God has given Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite, victory over Midian and all its allies!”

15 When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship before the Lord. Then he returned to the Israelite camp and shouted, “Get up! For the Lord has given you victory over the Midianite hordes!”

Judges 8 NLT

vv.27-28

27 Gideon made a sacred ephod from the gold and put it in Ophrah, his hometown. But soon all the Israelites prostituted themselves by worshiping it, and it became a trap for Gideon and his family.

28 That is the story of how the people of Israel defeated Midian, which never recovered. Throughout the rest of Gideon’s lifetime—about forty years—there was peace in the land.

vv.33-35

33 As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites prostituted themselves by worshiping the images of Baal, making Baal-berith their god. **34** They forgot the Lord their God, who had rescued them from all their enemies surrounding them. **35** Nor did they show any loyalty to the family of Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon), despite all the good he had done for Israel.

EXPLAIN

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone’s understanding of the Word.

Hebrews 11:32 begins a generalized section that completes the chapter. There are both named and unnamed characters—but no particular **stories of the faith** are tied with any individual as in the first 31 verses. The overarching reason for including them is that “their weakness was turned to strength” (see 11:33-35a). Verse 38a tells us that there were others “who were too good for this world”. They “refused to turn from God in order to be set free” and paid a terrible price for it (vv.35b-38). Lack of faith was not the problem; they were commended for their faith (v.39). Faith should never be measured by circumstances. Our faith and hope is “in a better life after the resurrection” (see v.35c). This section begins with a named character, **Gideon**, whose faith story is found in the O.T. book of Judges.

JUDGES 6 The book of Judges gets its name from the people who ruled Israel during the period between Joshua and Samuel. For the most part these people delivered the oppressed Hebrews who abandoned the God and faith of their ancestors (see Judges 2:10-16) and “did whatever seemed right in their own eyes” (see 17:6 and 21:25).

vv.11-16 Israel sins, God uses their enemies to put them in great distress, they cry out, God pities them, and raises up judges to rescue the Israelites from their oppressors—only to return to their corrupt ways (2:16-19). In the time of **Gideon** the Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. The enemy swept across them thick as locusts, reducing them to starvation—and they cry out to the Lord (see vv.1-10).

The angel of the Lord appears to Gideon who is **threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide from the Midianites**. His message is that **God is sending Gideon to rescue Israel**. Gideon balks, blaming God for the mess they are in—**the Lord has abandoned us**. (The truth lies in vv.7-10). I'm sure we don't have all the interaction between Gideon and the Lord. But Gideon becomes more open to the idea when God promises that He was sending Gideon, and because He would be with him, Gideon **would destroy the Midianites as if [he] were fighting against one man**. What stands up between me and my being used by the Lord?

vv.17-21 Gideon wants proof that it's really the Lord who is making these bold statements. In a spectacular show of power the angel touched the meal that Gideon had prepared, and **fire flamed up from the rock and consumed all he had brought**. God is always ready to affirm His presence with us. One of our ever-present problems is trusting our own skills and abilities to accomplish the task before us. That results in one of two attitudes: over-confidence and pride (never good), or defeatism (I can't do this). Jesus deals with both these attitudes in one sentence: "...apart from me you can do nothing" (see John 15:1-5). We don't need spectacular miracles to build our courage; we need to remember Jesus' promise: "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

vv.28-32 Gideon takes God at His word: *you cannot worship God and Baal*. It has to be one or the other. So he destroys his father's altar to Baal (see 6:25-27). After an investigation, the news breaks: **Gideon, the son of Joash...must die for destroying the altar of Baal and for cutting down the Asherah pole** (the image representing goddess of the Phoenicians and Syrians, whose worship was associated with that of Baal). Holy boldness and courage can have a powerful impact on others. Joash defends his son (Gideon) and takes his stand with the God of Israel: **If Baal truly is a God, let him defend himself and destroy the one who broke down his altar**. Does my life pull people toward God or away from God?

JUDGES 7 God has convinced Gideon that he is the next judge of Israel who will deliver them from the oppression of Midianites. He begins making his battle plans to go up against at least 135,000 warriors (see 8:10).

vv.1-2 God tells Gideon that his army of 32,000 (see v.3) is too large. God explains to Gideon: **"If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength."**

vv.7-15 Gideon's troops are whittled down to **300 men** whose weapons are rams' horns, clay jars with torches inside, and a shout for God (see vv.19-21). Three hundred against 135,000. Ridiculous!

...ordinary statistics can mislead so wildly. One God-filled personality may throw out all our usual calculations. Ten righteous men, said God, would have saved Sodom, when

whole battalions of unbelievers could not have done it. And you remember Gideon's strange stroke of generalship: he dismissed his original thirty-two thousand and started all over again with a paltry three hundred. Paltry? No. For every one of them was God's man.

—"God and the Moral Struggle", James S. Stewart

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory..." (Ephesians 3:21 NIV). **With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites.** Followers of Christ are here to glorify God by ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit. When the victory is won, make sure that you **bow in worship before the Lord**, for the great things HE has done.

JUDGES 8 The Lord gave a decisive victory to Gideon. This chapter also reminds us that a good man can fall. "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12 NIV).

vv.27-28 It is not for sure why **Gideon made a sacred ephod and put it in his hometown.** In doing so he invaded territory that belonged exclusively to the High Priest of Israel. Maybe Gideon believed that the High Priesthood had lost its worth. It seems from 8:1 that there may have been underlying hostility between Gideon and Ephraim (the location of the Tabernacle with its High Priest). Maybe Gideon felt that the place of worship should be where he, the judge, resided. Whatever the reason, it was wrong—a reckless decision that **became a trap for Gideon and his family**—perhaps the bait that enticed his family to eventually worship Baal. Sin—no matter how attractive and reasonable it appears—always has its consequences (Galatians 6:7).

vv.33-35 The fall of a good man doesn't mean he is disqualified from the work of God. Read David's song of forgiveness after his adulterous affair with Bathsheeba and the murder of her husband to cover it up (Psalm 32:1-5). **Despite all the good [we may do],** there will be some fallout. We may "walk with a limp" for the rest of our lives (and some others, too, may walk gingerly because of our sin). But the good news—the Gospel— is that God receives, forgives, and restores (see Psalm 51:1-2, 8-10, 17).

APPLY

A

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. How does Gideon demonstrate faith in God?

3. What can we learn about idol worship from these passages?
4. The book of Judges ends with this verse: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). In what way(s) is that statement a tragedy for Israel?
5. How can Gideon (along with the others in Hebrews 11) spur us on toward faithfulness?

R

RESPOND

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. In Judges 6:28-32, Gideon's father is faced with a choice. Am I going to stand with my society or am I going to stand with God? His culture wanted to kill Gideon for destroying a false god. Do you stand up for God in the face of a different view from society? What fear(s) might keep you from doing so? When we speak the truth, we should do so in love (Ephesians 4:15), not out of any selfish desire. If you do stand up for the truth, how can you be sure to do it in love, drawing them to Jesus instead of pushing them away?
2. All of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, including Gideon, had something in common. They all listened to and trusted God. You are only able to listen to God if you are in His Word. How are you communing with God right now?

Name a specific way you can avoid falling into the trap (Judges 8:27) of worshipping something other than God as Gideon ended up doing.