

## Gideon: An “Altared” Man Part 2 Judges 6:17-40

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Review

1. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of our character sketch of Gideon, the 5<sup>th</sup> Judge of Israel.
2. The setting for the Book of Judges is *after* Israel entered the Promised Land.
  - a. Moses’ successor Joshua led the nation on a brilliant military campaign that broke the back of Canaanite domination.
  - b. He then sent the 12 tribes of Israel to their assigned territories, tasked with the responsibility of removing their last enclaves.
  - c. Judges *begins* by telling us that this is where things started going badly –
    - 1) The tribes had only partial success in clearing out the Canaanites.
    - 2) A couple tribes were able to expel *most* of them.
    - 3) But some tribes, instead of ousting them, allowed them to stay & put them under tribute.
    - 4) *One tribe* was *wholly unable* to clear the Canaanites out of their territory; it was *they* who were expelled!
3. Because Israel disobeyed God by refusing to complete the Conquest of Canaan, it went just as God had warned them – Israel fell away from God & began to worship idols.
4. You see, the reason God commanded His people to *wipe out the Canaanites* was because they’d become so corrupt, so incredibly wicked, it was time for their judgment.
  - a. Their social & religious practices were so brutal & evil, they beggar description.
  - b. Human sacrifice had become a regular practice.
  - c. Israel was supposed to be God’s *tool of judgment* on the Canaanites.
  - d. But she shirked her calling & allowed the Canaanites to carry on their evil ways.
  - e. It wasn’t long before many of the people of Israel were seduced by those things, & began to worship the gods of the Canaanites.
  - d. Instead of being the means of God’s judgment, they began the long march down the *same road* that led to judgment.

- e. God tried to divert their course by sending, not judgment, but correction.
- f. He disciplined His erring children by allowing them to be oppressed by their enemies.
- g. After a period of harsh oppression, Israel would cry out to God in repentance,
- h. And He would answer by sending a deliverer who rallied the army of Israel & defeated their oppressors.
- i. Those deliverers were known as the Judges.
- j. And the people would stay true to God as long as the Judge lived.
- k. But when he died, they once again would turn from God to idols, & the cycle would start all over again.

## **B. Gideon**

1. Gideon was the 5<sup>th</sup> Judge, & His story is interesting because he seems an *unlikely hero*.
2. We began our study of Gideon last week with the first 16 verses of Ch. 6.
3. Because Israel had once again turned away from God to serve Baal & Asherah, God opened the door to *raiders* from the East to come in & lay siege to the region.
  - a. The lush pastures of Israel drew the Midianites & Amalekites out of their arid wilderness.
  - b. V. 5 says they covered the land like a plague of locusts.
4. When we first encounter Gideon, he's in hiding; threshing wheat in a winepress, not the usual place for threshing because it would make the task *so difficult*.
5. But he was hiding lest the Midianites see him & come steal his work.
6. It's while he's hiding in the winepress that a messenger from God appears to him & tells him that he's to deliver Israel her oppressors.
7. Gideon tries to beg off, saying he's a nobody . . .
  - a. His family has no position in his tribe,
  - b. And even in his own family, he has no authority.
  - c. In v. 15 he says he's the *least* in his father's house, meaning he was the youngest.

- d. As far as the world's concerned, Gideon was just an "also ran."
  - e. He wasn't even a *sergeant*, let alone *commander* of the army of Israel.
8. God answered by telling Gideon what qualified him was the promise of God's presence – that's all he needed to fulfill his call.
  9. Let's continue on now with his story . . .

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 17-21

**17 Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me.**

1. In v. 16 we learn the messenger who appeared to Gideon was none other than God Himself.
  - a. This was what's known as a *Christophany*, an appearance of Jesus in the OT.
  - b. But when He appeared to Gideon there in the winepress, it wasn't in the form of some radiant being shining with dazzling light.
  - c. As we read carefully, we realize He appeared as a *normal person*.
  - d. That's why Gideon doesn't fall on his face in terror.
  - e. When the Lord first greets him, instead of offering praise, Gideon challenges Him.
2. But as the conversation unfolds & the visitor speaks in the first person as God, Gideon starts to suspect something unusual is going on.
3. He says, "Okay, if you're really who You say You are, & You want me to know that You're appointing me to bring deliverance to Israel – give me a sign."
4. Here's the sign Gideon asks for -
 

**18 Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You." And He said, "I will wait until you come back."**
5. Gideon realizes if this is *really* the Lord, then the right response would be to make an offering.
6. So he says, "Wait here while I go get an offering ready."
7. The Lord said, "I'll wait."
8. Now, preparing an offering wouldn't be a quick or easy thing.

- a. V. 4 tells us the Midianites had plundered the livestock of Israel. Finding a sheep or goat would be tough.
- b. Then, once he found it, he'd have to *prepare* it.
- c. All this would take *at least* a few hours.
- d. And the entire time, the Lord waited there in the winepress as He said He would.

**19 So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought them out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented them.** **20 The Angel of God said to him,**

9. Remember that the word 'angel' means = 'messenger.'

10. As the Word of God, Jesus is *both* the Message & Messenger.

**“Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so.** **21 Then the Angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.**

11. When Gideon arrived back at the winepress, he found the Lord waiting there in the shade of a tree.

12. He told Gideon to set his offering on a nearby rock.

- a. When it was laid out, He then stretched out His staff & fire leapt out of the rock to consume it.
- b. In that instant, He vanished.

### **B. Vs. 22-24**

**22 Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the LORD.**

1. Brilliant deduction Watson!

**So Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face.”**

2. Gideon knew enough of the history of his people to know that the God of Israel is so holy no one can see Him in His glory & live.
3. When he realized he's just encountered God, he assumes the next thing he'd experience was death.
4. So God comforted him . . .

**23 Then the LORD said to him, “Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die.”**

5. Though God was not *visibly* present, Gideon could still hear His voice, which told him he wouldn't die.
6. He'd *not seen God in His glory*, He'd seen the Son of God Who'd appeared to him as a normal man, a traveler with staff in hand.

**24 So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it The-LORD-/s-Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.**

7. Round that rock where he'd placed the offering, Gideon constructed an altar.
  8. He named it, “Yahweh-Shalom = The Lord is Peace.”
  9. That altar became a *memorial to God* for Gideon & for those who came after him.
    - a. It was the point at which God began a new work in Gideon, & *through him*, to that entire generation.
    - b. When Gideon looked at that altar, it reminded him how the Lord had *called him* & given *the promise to be with him*.
    - c. As the deliverer of Israel, Gideon knew that peace would come, not through *his* strength or skill, but through God's presence.
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10. From this point forward, Gideon was an “altared” man.
    - a. While he still had some important lessons to learn & doubts to overcome, this moment marked a major turning point in his life.
    - b. It came when he stopped looking at his own limitations & began to focus instead on God's sufficiency.
  11. He named the altar after the revelation he'd been given – “The Lord is Peace.”
    - a. As he went forth to fulfill his call to be deliverer of Israel, some huge trials lay ahead.
    - b. But now he knew how to overcome them, through faith in the One who promised to be with him.
    - c. No matter how hairy it got, *as long as he kept his dependence on God*, he could be at peace.

12. Look at v. 16 –

**And the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you . . .”**

13. Now look at v. 23 –

**Then the LORD said to him, “Peace be with you”**

14. It was Gideon's awareness of the presence & sufficiency of God that would bring peace.
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15. Just as Gideon knew the call to follow God & offer himself as the deliverer of Israel would lead to huge challenges, so **the call to follow Jesus is an invitation to trails.**
- a. In John 16:33 Jesus said to the disciples . . .
- “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**

He went on to warn His followers that because the world opposed Him it will hate & oppose those who follow Him.

- b. People who think being a Christian is a crutch don't know what they're talking about.
- c. Being a Christian means taking a path very different from the rest of the World.
- d. Being a Christian means enduring the world's hostility.
- e. The Christian lives his/her life with the wind in their face, not at their back.
- f. Jesus made it clear – in this world, the believer will face difficulties & challenges galore because this world hates God & those who love Him.
- g. It can't be any other way.
- h. But in the midst of the challenges this world throws at us, we can have peace in the knowledge that Jesus has overcome the world, & He will never leave nor forsake us.
- 1) Because Jesus has overcome, ***trouble can't last.***
- 2) The day will come when He will enforce His victory & all opposition will cease.
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13. Remember what we learned last week – God had a plan to turn Gideon from someone who would ***hide*** from the enemy into a mighty man of valor who would ***attack*** that enemy & hand them a resounding defeat.
14. But it would take a huge challenge to bring forth the mighty man of valor out of the man who hid.
15. As Gideon faced that challenge – he realized ***the key to success was abiding in God.***

16. What was true for him, is true for us.
  - a. The peace we need is not found in our circumstances.
  - b. Peace is found in the Prince of peace.

### **C. Vs. 25-31**

**25** Now it came to pass the same night that the LORD said to him, “Take your father’s young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that *is* beside it; **26** and build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down.” **27** So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the LORD had said to him. But because he feared his father’s household and the men of the city too much to do *it* by day, he did *it* by night.

1. Gideon was called to deliver Israel.
  - a. But the call of God is something that has to begin at home.**
  - b. If we can’t apply our ministry to our own family, it’s ludicrous to think we can minister to others.
  - c. In giving qualifications of elders in 1 Tim. 3, Paul says that they must rule their own homes well.
  - d. How can they be expected to govern the household of God if their own homes are in disarray?
2. Before Gideon could go out against the enemy, he had to deal with the very stuff in his own family that had opened the door to the enemy in the first place.
  - a. As we consider this, is there something the Holy Spirit is bringing to mind?
  - b. Is there something in your home or at work that needs to be put away?
3. There in the village of Ophrah, was an altar to Baal that Gideon’s father Joash had built.
4. Next to it was an Asherah pole, a pornographic idol before which the people of Israel had committed gross debauchery.
5. God told Gideon to clean house!
  - a. He was to tear down the altar, cut down the pole.
  - b. Then make a new altar to Yahweh, the God of Israel, &

- sacrifice one of his father's precious bulls on it.
6. The altar to Baal was no little thing.
    - a. Archaeology has uncovered lots of these pagan altars.
    - b. They were many feet across & several feet high, covered with dressed stones or plastered.
    - c. They were located on the top of a hill.
    - d. Dismantling Baal's altar then building a new one to Yahweh would take a while.
    - e. So Gideon rounded up 10 of his family's servants & they headed out for the high place.
  7. He went at night because he feared if he was seen the men of Ophrah would try to stop him.
  8. Gideon has begun his journey of faith in God, but as this shows, he's got a ways to go.
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9. What we need to note is that God *doesn't rebuke* Gideon for doing this at night.
    - a. The scriptures make it clear in that Gideon was motivated by fear, which is a sign of a lack of faith,
    - b. But no rebuke comes from God.
  10. He knows spiritual growth *is a process*, & that faith is something that takes time to develop.
  11. Gideon will learn, his faith in God will deepen, & as it does, *his courage will grow*.
  12. So God is *patient* with him & lets him learn without heaping criticism on him.
  13. A word of caution for all of us – Let's be patient with people as they learn to trust in & obey God.
- 28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar *which had been built.* 29 So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."**
14. Think of it this way . . .
    - a. You drive to church this morning, & when you get here, this building has been torn down & lies in rubble,
    - b. While next door stands a mosque, with Arabic prayers are



blaring from huge loudspeakers on the roof.

- c. As a Christian, you'd be outraged, & itching to find those responsible.
15. That's what happened in Ophrah. The people rose to see Baal's altar in ruins & by it a new altar to a different God with a fresh offering still smoking.
16. It doesn't take long till the word is out that it was Gideon who was to blame.

**30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it."**

17. They wanted to *execute* Gideon for this sacrilege.

**31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!"**

18. We might expect Joash to hand Gideon over since he's the one who'd built Baal's altar.
19. But that is not his response to the men of Ophrah.
20. He says, "Let Baal defend himself!"
- a. "If he's the kind of god who's worthy of your devotion & outrage at this attack on his altar, then he can take care of himself.
  - b. And any man who would presume to take Baal's judgment into his own hands ought to be put to death for blasphemy!"
21. Joash was a man who'd gone along with the sensibilities of his time.
- a. When it became popular to worship Baal, he'd built him an altar.
  - b. When it became the "in thing" to erect an Asherah pole, he'd had one carved & set up next to the altar.
  - c. He was a man who wanted to stay current with the world, fitting in to its fashions.
22. But when his son took a stand for righteousness, Joash came to his senses & realized he'd been living for the wrong things.
23. Some things are more important than being hip, than being fly

& fashionable.

24. He came to realize that religion is not just a fad or trend – it's a matter of life & death.
  25. And when push came to shove, he decided to throw off the appeal of fashion to stand for righteousness with his son.
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26. It's heart-breaking to hear of people in who've come to Christ, then face huge opposition from their family & relatives.
  27. All kinds of pressure is applied to get them to forsake the Lord.
  28. They're left out of family gatherings; mean things are done & said.
  29. But an interesting thing happens time & again; those relatives who at first respond with opposition, many times end up coming to faith too.
  30. Taking a stand for Christ in your family may be difficult because of the hostility it engenders.
  31. Don't let that stop you from following the Lord. Don't let the threat of rejection silence you.
  32. Your family may curse you today – but they will bless you tomorrow!
  33. How many of you here today came to faith in Christ, at least in part, because a relative or family member was a Christian?

### **E. Vs. 32-35**

**<sup>32</sup>Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."**

1. Joash nick-named his son Gideon – Jerubbaal = "Let Baal deal with it!"

**<sup>33</sup>Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.**

2. As nomads, these people of the East didn't stay in one place for long.
3. They'd been roving far & wide over the lands of Israel, but now they encamp near Gideon's hometown.

**<sup>34</sup>But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.**

4. The Abiezrites were Gideon's clan in the tribe of Manasseh. The

village of Ophrah was their headquarters.

5. Trumpets were used in the ancient world to summons people.

6. The *sound* Gideon blew was the traditional call to battle.

**35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to [the tribes of] Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.**

7. The time was ripe & the people of Israel realized the moment had come for them to unite in repelling the raiders from the East.

8. And though Gideon's call to arms was a rousing success with thousands flocking to his banner, he wasn't sure he was going about things at the right time or in the right way.

9. So he asked for another sign . . .

#### **F. Vs. 36-40**

**36 So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said—**

1. Gideon knew God had called him to take the lead, but he just wasn't sure he was doing things the way the Lord wanted him to.

2. He wanted to make as certain as he could that he was in God's will.

3. So, he devises a little test – He says . . .

**37 look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is* dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said."**

4. Don't miss where Gideon conducted this test – on the threshing floor.

a. This was the very place he'd *avoided* when threshing wheat for fear of the Midianites.

b. But now that he's embraced the call to deliver Israel, he goes to this exposed place & sets this test.

c. He's now *more concerned* with honoring God than he's fearful of man & what people might say when they see him seeking God like this.

d. Gideon's holy reverence for God has banished the fear of man.

5. The test to discern God's will was this –

a. One evening He laid out an animal hide on the stone surface of

a threshing floor.

- b. If when he checked it early the next morning, the fleece was *wet* while the rest of the ground was dry, he would take it to mean that the time was right to attack.

**38 And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water.**

6. That fleece was much like a chamois that had absorbed a LOT of water, while the rest of the ground was dry as a bone.
7. But as Gideon thought about this, it dawned on him; “What if this was just coincidence? What if the fleece CAUSED the moisture in the air to condense on it?”
8. So he felt like he needed to add a *control* to his experiment.

**39 Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more:**

9. Gideon was concerned that asking for *another test* might appear to God as an unnecessary delay, or that he was once more trying to wiggle out of God’s calling.
10. He wasn’t! He just wanted to make sure he was hearing God right, & realized his first test was flawed.

**Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.”** <sup>40</sup> **And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.**

11. Gideon now realizes the first night’s test wasn’t a coincidence; it had been the answer of God, now confirmed by the second test.

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12. There are those Bible teachers who want to *fault* Gideon here & say this thing with the fleece was evidence of a lack of faith.
  - a. I don’t see that for all the reasons we’ve just seen.
  - b. Plus, God *never rebukes* Gideon.
  - c. He patiently goes along & confirms His will through these things.
13. You see, God knew that Gideon’s *concern* was to perform His will.
14. Maybe the way he went about *discovering* God’s will wasn’t the best, but God doesn’t correct him for it.

### III. CONCLUSION

## **A. Lessons**

1. What does this teach us? Well, a couple things . . .
2. **First**, as we read on, we discover that God gave Gideon specific direction *when he needed it*.
  - a. When Gideon did the fleece thing, he had thousands of men ready to go to war.
  - b. As he began to lead them into battle, God came to him with *specific instructions* about *how many* men he was to take.
  - c. Instead of laying out the fleece to discover God's will – Gideon *ought* to have simply obeyed the command he'd already received, attack!
  - d. It was as he *began to obey* that God could then direct him.
  - e. You can't steer a parked car, it needs to be moving – and the same is true of our lives.
  - f. We hear that God wants to use us, & we ask: "How? Where? When? Who? What? Why?"
  - g. Many people demand that God give them the whole game-plan before they take the first step.
    - 1) They want a set of detailed blueprints laying out God's design before they will budge.
    - 2) God doesn't work that way! He only shows us the *next step*.
    - 3) We have to take it in faith, trusting that once we do, He'll reveal the step after that.
  - h. Gideon teaches us that having a concern to be in God's will is a good thing, but a desire to know His *future will* must not become an excuse for not doing His present will.
  - i. Do what God has told you *today*, & let Him take care of tomorrow.
3. **Second**, Does Gideon's use of a fleece mean we ought to use such means to discover God's will for our lives?
  - a. Oh my, look – we're out of time.
  - b. You'll have to come back Wednesday night as we finish our study of Gideon to get the answer to that question.

## **B. Summary**

1. Let me end with this –
2. Gideon is a great example of a man who grew in faith from fear to courage.
3. He went from hiding in a winepress to courageous deliverer of the

people of God.

4. Yet Gideon was a man no different than you & I.
5. What made him great was his dependence on a great God.
6. His courage came from trusting in the Lord who promised to be with him.
7. That same promise is made to you and I in Christ.
8. Gideon was an “altared” man – one who was changed by the revelation of God.
9. You and I can be altared people too is we will but offer ourselves as living sacrifices.