

Gideon: solution or problem?

Judges 6-9

Read Judges 6:1-10

1. Comparing the opening of this story with the start of the Othniel, Ehud and Deborah stories, what differences do you notice?
2. What point does God make through his prophet?

At the beginning of this 'judge cycle', there is a greater focus than before on the Israelites oppression. But God doesn't rescue them straight away. He sends a prophet to tell the Israelites he's getting sick of their continual unfaithfulness.

Read Judges 6:11-24

3. What kind of a character is Gideon? Is his attitude appropriate?

Read Judges 6:25-32

4. Where are the idols that Gideon knocks down? Is this surprising?
5. What does this episode tell you about the sincerity of the Israelites' cries to God?

Read Judges 6:33-40

6. Why does Gideon put out his fleece? Is it appropriate?

Gideon is introduced in a positive light. On the one hand he's willing to destroy his own father's idols when God asks him to (admittedly under the cover of darkness). On the other hand he is a very humble character. He knows that if God isn't with him he doesn't stand a chance. There's a childlike dependence on God which is absolutely appropriate.

7. Have a look at Matt 18:1-4. How should we as Christians express this kind of childlike trust? Do we need to put out the fleece?

Read Judges 7

8. Why does God send so many men home?
9. What makes the battle such a success (v22)?
10. How would you describe Gideon's military tactics?

Read Judges 8:1-3

11. How would you describe Gideon's diplomacy skills in these verses?

In the story so far Gideon has been presented as a model judge. He is a mix of military prowess, diplomatic skill and a genuine dependence on God. Maybe he'll be the one to lead Israel out of their cycle of rebellion and unfaithfulness and back to serving God alone.

Read Judges 8:4-21

12. How many interactions with God does Gideon have in this part of his campaign? How does this compare with his first campaign in chapters 6-7?
13. What do you make of God's silence?
14. How does Gideon's diplomacy with the people of Succoth and Peniel compare to his diplomacy with the Ephraimites?
15. What was the real motivation behind Gideon's pursuit of Zebah and Zalmunna (v 18-19)?
16. Does Gideon's son remind of anyone you've met earlier in the story?

A new Gideon emerges in this final section of the campaign. No longer in constant dialogue with God, he pursues a private vendetta against Zebah and Zalmunna for killing his brothers. Instead of the diplomacy of v 1-3, he cruelly punishes anyone who doesn't help him. The contrast between the new and the old Gideon is highlighted by his fearful son who sounds exactly like Gideon did back at the beginning of the story.

Read Judges 8:21-32

17. What offer does Gideon's success in his private war lead the Israelites to make?
18. Was this an appropriate offer (remember Judges 7:2, 14-15)?
19. How would you describe the end of Gideon's career? How does it compare with the beginning (see Judges 6:25-32)?

What we start to see very clearly in the Gideon story is that while the judges might be part of God's solution to Israel's problems, they are also part of those problems. Not only does Gideon's personal revenge lead the people to forget that God was their real deliverer, he even sets up an ephod which leads all Israel astray! At the end of Gideon's career the Israelites are no closer to serving God than at the beginning.

20. What is God's ultimate solution to the problem of rebellion and unfaithfulness?
21. How does God's solution overcome the problems of a human saviour like Gideon?

Thank God for his provision of a saviour who is free from the problems of sin and rebellion and can provide a genuine solution to these problems.