

# Gideon: The Unexpected Hero

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[ 0 : 00 ] So this is Judges and starting at chapter 6 at the beginning of the chapter.

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds.

Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern people invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza, and did not spare a living thing for Israel.

Neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels.

They invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help. When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, he sent them a prophet who said, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says.

[ 1 : 24 ] I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians, and I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors.

I drove them out before you and gave you their land. I said to you, I am the Lord your God. Do not worship the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live, but you have not listened to me.

The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak of Ophrah that belonged to Joash, the Abiezraite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, The Lord is with you, mighty warrior. Pardon me, my Lord, Gideon replied, But if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?

Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt? But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.

[ 2 : 43 ] The Lord turned to him and said, Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of the Midian's hands. Am I not sending you?

Pardon me, my Lord, Gideon replied, But 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, leaving none alive. Gideon replied, If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it's really you talking to me.

Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you. And the Lord said, I will wait until you return.

Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast, putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot.

- [ 3 : 51 ] He brought them out and offered them to him under the oak. The angel of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock and pour out the broth.
- And Gideon did so. Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread.
- And the angel of the Lord disappeared. When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, Alas, sovereign Lord, I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.
- But the Lord said to him, Peace, do not be afraid. You are not going to die. So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it, The Lord is Peace.
- To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. That same night the Lord said to him, Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old.
- [ 5 : 09 ] Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord, your God, on the top of this height.
- Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering. So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him.
- But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime. Thanks.
- So Anne asked me if I wanted to do that reading. And having struggled with all the ites and tights, I'm extremely glad that you did that.
- So thank you. There should be a slide. Does anyone know what this random dot autostereogram?
- [ 6 : 16 ] Yes. They're also known as something else. Have all of you picked up one of these? You can stick it on the next slide. They're also called magic eye pictures.
- Anyone not got one of them? These are amazing. They sort of came to prominence in the 1990s. And they are either amazing or infuriating or a bit of both, depending upon what you can see.
- So hidden in what looks like a sort of totally random image. Maybe do another one for me. Let's just go through the different ones that we've got. It's a secret thing.
- But you need to do some things in order to see it. First of all, you sort of need to believe that there's something else in there. You know, that it's not just a random bunch of mess.
- The second thing... Oh, I can see it. That is so cool and so irritating for some of you. The next thing you need to do is actually not focus on that image.
- [ 7 : 29 ] You need to actually focus beyond it. Bev and Tom, you can now do it, can't you? One of them.
- That's brilliant. You can see one of them. So you need to sort of focus beyond it. And then if you just look back down at it, you can see either an image or in this one, a message.
- The third thing you need to do is not get distracted while you're doing it. If you keep on looking all over the place, it's not going to work. You need to believe, you need to focus, and you need to not be distracted.
- Hands up if you can see anything in any of those pictures. Yeah? All right? Some of you can. I'm going to ask you what they are later. Okay? You can now put them down.
- Maybe pick up your Bible or your phone, your app, whatever you use to look at God's Word. So let's go through the magic eye pictures, please.

[ 8 : 40 ] I realize I should have got the zapper, but I'm going to rely on Richard being my... If I do that... It works. Pretty good. So today we're in the last of our weeks of Tales of the Unexpected.

How God uses unexpected people and unexpected circumstances to bring healing into his world. Today we're going to look at Gideon.

So just to sort of put that in context, actually, historically, he fits somewhere in the middle of the characters that we've been looking at. The people of Israel have been called...

Abraham was called out of Ur. He followed God. They ended up in Egypt being oppressed, and they were freed. And Joshua and Rahab and the spies helped them get out.

And it's before they have been taken off into exile. And before Joshua dies, he tells the people to sort of finish off the job. He said, you need to push these people out of the land that I have given you.

[ 9 : 48 ] But it says that when Joshua died, a generation came up who neither knew the Lord nor knew what he had told them to do.

And can we have the next slide, please? And we enter into the book of Judges. And Judges is just like this frustrating cycle that goes round and round and round.

It's like one of those teenagers' T-shirts that says, eat, sleep, something, repeat. Only in the case of the Israelites, it went like this.

It said, every man did what he thought was right. And then the people did evil in the sight of the Lord.

It then said, God let other people who they'd left in the land persecute them. The people would cry out to God.

[ 10 : 44 ] God would raise up a judge who often was a warrior. And today we're going to think about Gideon as being an unexpected warrior. But they were also judges telling people about God's law.

He raised up a judge. The enemy was subdued and there was a time of peace. Or actually it says there was a time of rest in the land.

There are 12 judges. You can read about their story in the book of Judges. Some of them are pretty gruesome. If you think the Bible is a boring book, read the first five chapters of the book of Judges.

You'll never go camping with, you know, quite the same. You'll look at people who are left-handed and the danger of obesity differently if you read those five chapters.

But the books are all... The 12 people that God rose up all tell a similar story this cycle.

[ 11 : 49 ] And today we're going to think about four things about Gideon. But they're not really four things about Gideon. They're really four things about God. And the first one that we're going to think about is God's plan.

Can we have the next slide, please? So you read those first verses in Judges 6, and they're pretty depressing, aren't they? It describes the Midianites being like a plague of locusts that descends upon the land.

It uses phrases like ravaging. They came up with their livestock and tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them. They invaded the land to ravage it.

And it's quite sad that that went on for seven years before it then said this. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.

I guess all we can do now is pray. I wonder how easily we fall into that same trap. But God had always promised his people that he would be with them.

- [ 13 : 01 ] And as it says in that verse from Isaiah there, God is both able and willing to act. It says, the Lord's hand is not short that it can't save, nor his ear so dull that it cannot hear.
- And lovingly, if we look in the next verses, in verses eight onwards, it says, he sent a prophet. And he sent a prophet not so much to berate them, but to remind them.
- First of all, to remind them of his love. I brought you up out of Egypt. To remind them of his power.
- I rescued you. I delivered you. So why were they where they were? If we can have the next slide. Sadly, part of God's plan, he knows his people and he reminds them of their responsibility.
- It says, I am the Lord your God. Do not worship the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live, but you have not listened to me.
- [ 14 : 15 ] And it explains why they are where they are. It was part of that cycle. And God said that when you go away from me, you will lose the blessing of my protection.
- And the children of Israel were sort of depressed and confused. They were despondent. And when we first meet Gideon, our Bible hero, our hero of the faith, he is literally depressed.
- The Bible says he is in a wine press threshing wheat. That's the wrong place to be doing that activity.
- When you thresh wheat, it's a way in which you throw the wheat in the air and you bang it and you fling it in the air so that the chaff will blow away and just the valuable grain will fall down.
- But he was so frightened of the Midianites, probably quite reasonably so, that he was doing this activity in a sort of depressed way, in a wine press down in the ground.
- [ 15 : 34 ] And I heard someone say that the period of judges for the children of Israel, and I'm not going to look up at Jacob when I say this, is a little bit like a nation's teenage years.
- It's like maybe something should be forgotten when you look back. And I can almost hear Gideon, I don't know if you remember that depressed teenager.
- Who was it? Harry Enfield did a and I can almost hear Gideon say that when God greets him or through an angel, God greets him.
- and you can hear Gideon's sort of frustration in his reply when he says, pardon me. I'm not sure if that's a very accurate translation given the teenagers that I know.
- But anyway, it says, pardon me. He says, why has all of this, it's so unfair. Why has all of this happened to us?
- [ 16 : 43 ] where are your wonders? You don't love us. The Lord has abandoned us.
- The problem is both Gideon and the children of Israel were letting their circumstances dictate their theology. and that's a really dangerous place to be because your circumstances will go up and go down.
- And if we let our circumstances dictate our faith or our theology or how we think about God, then when we go through challenging times, our theology is rocked.
- And all Gideon could see was a mess. That's all he could see. It's all gone wrong. It's just a mess.
- Can you give us the next slide, please? And, you know, if we're honest, some of our circumstances that we find ourselves in can be caused by our choices.
- [ 17 : 58 ] as well. The Bible's, God's warnings were not just to the Israelites, they are to us as well. The wages of sin is death, Paul said.

The ultimate separation from God. It says, be sure your sin will find you out. That there are natural consequences when we get in the wrong place in that cycle.

When we choose to step out of God's will. And I know that many of you are in difficult circumstances. And sometimes we have to admit that they're caused by our choices.

But that is not the only way in which this can happen. Some are caused by our circumstances, but some are clearly not. If we look at some of the stories we've looked at already, I love the story of Joseph.

I'm not sure it wasn't his fault he didn't end up in that well. Okay? He was a pretty annoying younger brother to have. And not being the younger brother, I think it was at least some of his blame.

[ 19 : 15 ] But how did he end up in prison? For standing up for what is right. sometimes the right thing will lead you into difficult circumstances.

Esther ended up living with Mordecai because her parents have both died. Sometimes bad things happen.

Or the story that Jesus tells, the story in the gospel where Jesus heals a man born blind from birth. People say to Jesus, who sinned?

This man or his parents? And Jesus said, neither. God just used this circumstance to show my power. And just like with these pictures, what matters is not that we see a mess, it's how we react to the mess, the choices that we make.

Jesus promised us that in this world you will have troubles. but he prefaced it by saying this should bring us peace because we know that he has overcome the world and that he can be with us even in the mess that we see and that he can bring something new out of it.

[ 20 : 39 ] So, do we let our circumstances dictate our faith? do we let our faith be shaken by our circumstances or does our faith help us see past our circumstances and see something more beautiful that God has for us?

In Romans 8, Paul said this, we know that God causes all things, whether our fault or somebody else is, to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

God has a plan and we are part of it. Next slide please. The next, now I hope you appreciate this, in true Baptist tradition there are four points and they all begin with P.

Okay? God's perspective. So God's mighty warrior Gideon is there depressed in the winepress and God through this person appears to him, the angel of the Lord came down and sat under the oak in Ophrah where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon he said the Lord is with you mighty warrior. Now I think that's you know it's either sarcastic and I don't think God is sarcastic or God could just see something different.

[ 22 : 31 ] God does not define us. God's perspective of us how he looks at us and how he sees us is not defined by what we're doing.

It's defined by who he says he has made us to be. He sees differently and I love that he doesn't say greetings you who will become a mighty warrior.

Greetings you who if you go through this training program have the potential to be something great. He says you are a mighty warrior.

You're just not acting like it yet. And Gideon reacts probably quite correctly. I love it. He's so polite isn't he?

Pardon me sir. How can this be? Because I am the least. And he goes through the reasons why he is not a mighty warrior.

[ 23 : 35 ] why God shouldn't be using him. And it's really interesting that God doesn't argue with Gideon. He doesn't say oh no you know your tribe isn't that bad.

He says it doesn't matter where you come from. It matters who I am making you into. And God came up with this one simple answer.

He said I will be with you. And it was the same promise that God had given Moses when he felt inadequate.

It was the same promise that God had given Joshua when he felt that he was inadequate. And if you read in the Bible God says this about you if you have chosen to follow him.

that I will never leave you or forsake you. I will always be at your side. Can we have the next slide?

[ 24 : 39 ] And so the question is I guess how do we look at ourselves? Is it through sort of what I call selfies or likes?

It's really easy for us to define who we are based on what we think of ourselves? Or maybe we define who we are by what other people say about us.

But both of those things are a bad idea. I love this passage in Jeremiah where it tells us where we should put our trust.

And I'm not going to read all of it to you. But it says this. It says cursed is the one who trusts only in man, who draws all his strength from mere flesh.

Don't rely on what other people say about you. It's also in that passage where it says this, the heart is deceitful above all other things.

[ 25 : 37 ] Don't trust yourself because you'll go one of two ways. You'll either think you're all that, you'll put a good filter on yourself in your selfie, or you'll look at it and you'll be totally dissatisfied.

instead of that we should do what this passage in Jeremiah tells us. It says blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

They will be like a tree, see why I love this passage, planted by the water that sends out its roots into the stream. It doesn't fear when heat comes, when the mess comes.

Its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought, and it never fails to bear fruit. We need to trust what God says about us, because it never changes, and it refreshes, and it leads to life.

Can we have the next slide, please? Just like, I don't know if you can see any of these yet, people. Just like in order to see what's really there, you mustn't focus on what's right in front of you.

[ 26 : 57 ] And it can take time, but then you can see something beautiful and wonderful. And God through his word encourages us to do the same things.

At the end we're going to sing that song, I am who you say that I am. And we need to pick up the word, and spend time every day reading who God says that we are.

There's just some of them there. I'm chosen, I'm an overcomer, I'm never alone, I'm forgiven, I'm his treasured possession. And it's only when we focus beyond the obvious, we focus beyond what we see, that we can start to be the people that God has made us to be all along.

God has a plan, God has a perspective about who you are. Next slide please. But he also has a process. Gideon was a mighty warrior, now he just needed to start acting like one.

And there's work for Gideon to do. And again, I'm not going to read all of this, go back and read it all yourself in your own time.

[ 28 : 18 ] But God tells him that he should go. There's sort of two things here. He says to Gideon, you need to go in the strength you have, in the strength I've given you.

And first of all, you'll notice, he doesn't say you're a mighty warrior, go and sort out those Amalekites. Where does he tell Gideon to start?

With his own junk. Gideon is told that the first thing I want you to do as a mighty warrior is in your own life. It's in your own home, your own backyard, if you like.

He's told to tear down the altar of Baal, the obvious sins, if you like. They were carved, sometimes wooden, but most of the time stone altars.

They were really an obvious offensive symbol. They were told not to worship those gods. And he was also told to tear down something called the Asherah or the Asherum pole.

[ 29 : 30 ] And if you look historically, these are interesting. Sometimes they were really obvious. They were carved poles. They were to a fertility goddess, Asherah.

But sometimes they were much more subtle. Sometimes the Asherah pole was just a tree that had a subtle carving in it. But God is telling Gideon to get rid of it all and to just worship God.

Not the obvious, the altars, but not the subtle compromise either, carved into some trees. And I'm really encouraged by the way that Gideon does this.

And actually if you read the rest of Gideon, the rest of six and seven and eight, you'll see that Gideon is a mighty warrior, but he's very much a work in progress.

When did he cut down the altar? At night. Because he was afraid of what other people would think. But he cut it down. what about, you know, if you ask people what they know about Gideon, they'll normally say a fleece.

[ 30 : 42 ] He doubted God maybe or he certainly wanted reassurance, didn't he? He was a work in progress. And actually if you read in chapter eight, his idolatry reared its ugly head again.

He had the people make an ephod and his religion came back. His fear didn't disappear through the whole story. Before he attacked Midian, the very night before he did it, God said, if you're still scared, go down to the camp.

And what did Gideon do? Go down to the camp. He never stopped being afraid. But that never stopped God from using him.

He was a work in progress. Go in the strength I have given you. And as Anne was telling us, it's not about our strength, it's about God's strength.

Again, you can read in Judges seven about that, the whittling down of 32,000 men that Gideon had down to 300.

[ 31 : 51 ] And I was always taught that this was like God's way of whittling out the people who were scared. Not Really Appropriate, a little bit like, I hope none of you have really watched that Russell Crowe film, it's a bit bloody.

The 300 was all about getting down to 300 crack troops. But I don't think that's what the story tells at all.

I was always told that to start with go home if you're scared, fine, but actually Gideon should have gone home as well. It was just a way to reduce the number of people.

What about the go down to the river and lap like dogs? I was always taught that God just wanted the best, the people who were alert.

But that goes against the whole story. In that case, why didn't he pick the best person to lead the army, not the least person? I think he just wanted 300 goofy people to show that the victory was his.

[ 32 : 59 ] You have too many men. I'm quite surprised Gideon didn't say, pardon me, because following God doesn't always make sense.

I think sometimes God's quite happy to tell us what to do, but not explain why he's asking us to do it. And part of faith is believing him and believing that the power that he gives us will be enough, that I can go because he has given me the strength.

Can we have the next slide please? And in the same way, we are encouraged to get up and go. And there's lots of different analogies used in the New Testament, but I chose this one.

I love it. There's work for us to do. The writer to the Hebrews says, and he writes this bit in Hebrews 12 just after he's told the readers about all these amazing characters in the Old Testament, including Gideon.

He says, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, the obvious, the not so obvious, the sin that so heavily entangles, and let us run with perseverance, the race marked out for us.

[ 34 : 28 ] There's a lot of us in there, isn't there? For us to throw off what hinders us, not just the sin, the things that entangle us.

don't start with others, don't start with Midian, start at home. And I think God is calling us not to look outside, but to start with ourselves, to deal with our own junk, and build a proper altar to him.

And that takes discipline. A bit like this, if I just keep on looking around, if I get distracted by other things, then I will never see the true image that God has prepared for me.

And so we need to be disciplined in how we approach our lives too. Almost the last slide, Richard, please. Finally, God's purpose.

Now, I'm no scholar, but I did look up that word, and the land had peace. So, Gideon beat the Midianites, and he drove them out, and it says that God's ultimate goal actually was the closing of that loop, the bringing of peace.

[ 35 : 53 ] But it's interesting, it judges the word that it uses for peace. It's different to the word that it uses often for peace in the Old Testament.

It's actually better translated as rest, rest, or a break. Gideon was an imperfect person, and it only brought rest.

Sadly, not the word peace, shalom, which is what God really wants to bring. And the people of Israel, I think, constantly kept on getting it wrong.

I love that that picture is literally a bed of roses. And they thought that God choosing them was all about them. It was to give them a cushy life.

But when God called Abraham, what did he say he was a blessing? What was the purpose? He said, you are blessed to be a blessing. And he told his people that they were to be a light to all of the nations.

[ 36 : 57 ] That part of his plan goes way beyond, way deeper than just us. God wants to bring us peace too.

In Ephesians, there's a beautiful passage where it says that Jesus is our, and it used the Greek equivalent of shalom, our true peace, our restoration, our putting back together.

He makes us whole again. and it's only if we're willing that we get to take part in this restoration.



Did anyone manage to see what's behind this? Yeah. It's a heart. Can you put the next slide on? I don't know if you can see what's part of God's plan, but it isn't so that our lives can be a bed of roses.

it's so that we can share his love and his heart with those around us. I'm going to finish just by telling you one story and I'm still not sure if this is a good idea.

[ 38 : 14 ] It only came for me to share this story on Friday morning. I'm in this story, but this is not a story about me, okay?

Friday morning I was in Filey. Oh, this is going to be hard.

It's my favorite place in the world. It's where we spent all of our holidays as children, and I spent it with my favorite person in the world, my dad.

And I had to the balloon when I was 13, he died of a heart attack. 49, never smoked, never drank, and I was crushed, really confused.

Pardon me. Where was God? How could he let that happen? God? And people spoke to me about God's will, and I did not want to hear it.

[ 39 : 21 ] I used some different words, not pardon me. God's God's God's will, God's will, and I resented God. And I sought refuge in my own caves as I went to university, but God was patient and kind, and he sent people who were like prophets, who just kept reminding me of his love, his fatherhood.

And over time, I started to focus not on myself, but on him. And I started going to a church, and I started doing a little bit of work in the youth group there.

It was the Church of England church, and God had to do some work in my life, so I had to let him tear down some altars. But over time, I came to know him as the father to the fatherless.

And then two people came up to me and said, we'd like you to go and do something. They said, we run this Christian camp for children from public day schools, I think.

No, public trust day and boarding schools. I had no idea what they meant. And as they explained to me what they wanted me to do, they wanted me to go and take an entire week's teaching at this residential place.

[ 40 : 47 ] And it was for what I described at the time as posh kids. The kids came from Eton and Harrow and Marlborough and Stowe and schools.

And like Gideon, I said, pardon me? How can you, just to contextualize this, I went to a school where less than 5% of us went to university.

I'd actually just graduated with the most evangelical of all degrees, the Desmond. Tutu.

Okay? And I thought, how can I be asked to go and do this? But they said, no, we think God wants you to do it. And I was terrified.

There was 120 of them and one of me. I know how Gideon fell. But I believed. And God gave me a message.

[ 41 : 52 ] And it was run by a church called Holy Trinity. And so I spoke about God being the Father, being the Son, and God being the Holy Spirit. And on the night when I spoke about God being the Father, I could share with these young boys who I thought were so privileged about a father who loved them.

And some of them began to cry because their parents, they weren't dead, but they were abroad and these boys had been sent to boarding school. And as I shared with them my experience of God healing and being a loving father, they started to cry.

And many of them that night gave their lives to Jesus for the first time. That's not a story about me. That's a story about God using a mess for his glory to bring his peace, his shalom.

All we have to do is be willing to take our part. And so from this story of Gideon and actually all these characters that we've looked at, we can learn.

We need to remember that God has a plan and we are part of it. We need to know that he is calling us imperfect individuals and an imperfect gathering of individuals.

[ 43 : 26 ] We need to believe what he says about us to answer his call to take action and to go in the strength that he's given us and play our part in bringing his shalom to this world.

Amen.