

**The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications**

## **People of the Bible**

# **GIDEON**

**To the reader:** Keep your Bible beside you. Always read your Bible first, then read these notes. Check the references and read them also. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

### **GIDEON - A JUDGE IN ISRAEL**

**Introduction:** The Book of Judges tells us about many places. They are not known now. The dust of thousands of years covers these old cities. When people dig into the mounds where these cities were, they find things like stone walls, roads, old coins and broken pottery. This helps us learn more about the times in which the Israelites lived. Some places named in Judges can be found on a map of Palestine, but many names have been changed.

God chose the tribes of Israel to be His people (Deut 6:7). He wanted Israel to honour Him and make Him known in the world, but they did not obey His commands. They turned their backs on God. When they needed God's help most, they went their own way and worshipped idols (1 Sam 12:8-11). Men who trust God and obey His commands receive His protection and help. Those who stand on God's promises have victory. Those who reject Him have no victory in their lives.

### **SATAN, OUR GREAT ENEMY**

Satan is the great enemy of God and the enemy of God's people. Satan hides his true nature. He comes to us in all sorts of masks. Those who serve the Lord must watch for Satan's tricks and stand against him. Christians stand against Satan in the name of Jesus Christ. We stand in Christ's victory and claim the protection God has promised us.

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt where they had been slaves for 400 years. Joshua led them into Canaan, the land had promised to their forefathers. Long before, God had told Moses how to divide the land among the twelve tribes of Israelites. And God had promised to give them victory over the peoples that lived in the land.

Satan had power over the land of Canaan. He ruled in the hearts of its people. They were very wicked. God said He would destroy them because of their evil ways. He told Israel to take their land and occupy it (Deut 7:1-6).

### **NO PRIEST OR TABERNACLE**

In all the history of Judges, no mention is made of the priesthood God set up to help the people worship Him. Nothing is said of a High Priest in Israel. This was a period of about 250 years (1 Chronicles 6:4-7; Ezra 7:3-5).

How could Israel let the priesthood, which began with such glory under Moses, stop so quickly? The answer is that man's heart always turns away from God. Israel did not keep the laws God gave them at Mt Sinai (Ex 28).

Israel's High Priest was a type, a picture pointing to Jesus. The full blessings of the High Priest and the priesthood were still to come. We enjoy them in the person of Christ our great High Priest

(Heb 8:1-2,6). And in the Christian Church where every born-again person belongs to 'a holy priesthood'. "(1 Peter 1:5).

#### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Who is God's enemy?
2. Who is the Christian's greatest enemy?
3. How could the leaders in Israel let the priesthood, which began with such glory under Moses, stop so quickly?

### **Read: Judges 1:1-10**

#### **AFTER JOSHUA DIED**

"After the death of Joshua..." introduces us to this period of Israel's history (Jud 1:1). Joshua was more than a military commander. He loved the Lord God and he walked with God every day of his life. He led the people in worship and consecrated them before they went into battle. He prayed for them and gave them wise counsel.

Joshua divided the land among Israel's twelve tribes and helped them settle in it. But they did not obey the Lord and drive the enemy out completely. "They took possession of the hill country, but they were not able to drive the people from the plains, because they had iron chariots" (Jud 1:19,31).

The Philistines knew how to make and sharpen iron tools (1 Sam 13:19). The Canaanites had iron chariots (4:3; Jos 17:16). They also used iron to make beds (Deut 3:11). The King of Bashan's bed was put in a museum, but not because it was made of iron. He was a giant and his bed was very large. Because Israel did not fully obey the Lord, these people made trouble for them. They plundered the land (Jud 2:14).

So "the Israelites asked the Lord, 'who will be first to go up and fight against the Canaanites?'" (1:1). "The Lord answered, 'Judah is to go; I have given the land into their hands'" (1:2). God's command left no room to argue.

Judah was to take the lead. Judah means 'praise.' Praise and worship must come first, then we can go up to do battle against Satan (Eph 6:12).

Judah was the most in number and the strongest tribe - first in faith and promise. Jacob blessed his son, Judah, with the words, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes..." (Genesis 49:10 NASB). This was a prophecy and promise of the Messiah. Jesus would come as "The lion of the tribe of Judah" and He would rule as King (Rev 5:5).

#### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Who was Joshua?
2. What great thing did he do?
3. What did the Philistines have that frightened the Israelites (Jud 4:3)?
4. As we face the enemy, Satan, we might well ask, "Who will go up first?"
5. Do your friends ask you to pray for them to have victory over Satan?
6. Do you take a stand against the enemy's influence in your neighbourhood?

### **THE LORD GAVE VICTORY**

Judah did not complain about being first to go up against the enemy. When Judah attacked, the Lord gave the wicked Canaanites (Perizzites) into their hands and they struck down ten thousand at Bezek (Jud 1:4).

The Lord did not let Israel down. But they turned their back on Him. Because they did not obey His commands, God let the nations living around them raid their farms and steal their crops and herds.

## **Read: Judges 6:1-40**

### **GIDEON OF OPHRAH**

The Gideon's story is the main story in the Book of Judges. It is set between the record of two other Judges:

1. Deborah of Ephraim, a son of Joseph, who lived west of Jordan, and
2. Jephthah of Manasseh, the other son of Joseph, from east of Jordan. We can only guess at the meaning of this.

Midianites from Moab (Num 22:4) and Amalekites raided Israel every year and took the crops and animals. They came across the Jordan River from Transjordan. And they came to raid the farms of Israel and they tried to take back the land God had given His people Israel (Jud 6:5).

Midian was a son of Abram (Gen 25:2). Moab, a son of Lot, was despised by others who said Moabites were ignorant men with no culture. They had been defeated by Israel some time earlier (Num 31:7). Now they joined with the Amalekites, (of Edom, Gen 12:16) from the Gulf of Aqaba, to fight against Israel.

### **THEY JOINED FORCES AGAINST ISRAEL**

These heathen peoples joined forces to fight against the people of Israel. They moved north, crossed the Jordan, and set up their tents. Then they went out to raid Israel's farms. They overpowered the different clans of Israel and advanced as far west as Gaza.

The raiders always came just at harvest time. They trampled down the crops and took animals for food. Anything the people could glean from their fields and groves they hid in caves and dens (Jud 6:2). A guilty conscience had made them timid.

Israel knew they did not follow God's laws, but in their distress they cried to the Lord. The Lord was waiting for them to call to Him. He was ready to hear them. He was ready to forgive and show mercy.

First God sent a prophet to speak to them. We can guess that a young man of Manasseh, Gideon, heard this unnamed prophet speak God's message: "The Lord, the God of Israel says: I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors, I drove them from 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" (Jud 6:7-10).

Most of the people heard this unnamed prophet, but they did not take any notice. So God sent His Angel to speak to a young man in the tribe of Manasseh.

### **THE ANGEL CAME TO GIDEON**

Gideon was hiding the winepress. He was threshing a small amount of grain he had gleaned from the ravished fields. His father had planted a large plot of land, but the Midianites had reaped the harvest. There was not an ox left to tread out the grain, so Gideon was threshing it by hand.

His father did not worship the living God. He worshipped the idol Baal at the village shrine in the town of Ophrah where he lived with his family.

An angel came from heaven to Gideon of Ophrah (Jud 6:11). He called to Gideon, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior..." (6:12, 27). "Mighty warrior" meant a person of rank, not one of the lower classes of men.

Gideon was startled and asked the Angel, "If the Lord is with us why has all this happened to us" (6:13-14)? "Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us in the hand of Midian."

## **GIDEON'S CLAN WAS THE SMALLEST IN ISRAEL**

The Lord, the Angel, turned to Gideon and spoke to him with all the authority of God: "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

"But, Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (6:15).

What a picture...Mighty God and tiny man! God holding the whole world in His hand, and man hiding from the enemy, or trying to hide.

Gideon went on, "The Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." (6:13) Gideon was confused, but the Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together...I will be with you...you will thresh Midian instead of these grains of wheat " (Is 41:15).

Gideon had the promise of God, but he still did not feel very sure of himself. He might have thought, 'Is this just my mind playing tricks on me?' So he asked God for a sign..."Give me a sign that it is really you (Lord) talking to me," he prayed (6:17).

God will give us assurance in our hearts. The Holy Spirit will put it there. We have the promise of God. If you need wisdom, ask for it (Jas 1:5).

Gideon said, "Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering..." (6:17). "The Lord (angel) answered, 'I will wait until you return.'"

God was saying to Gideon, 'I will defeat the Midianites, but you will share in My victory.' This is a principle we all need to understand. Our offering is important! God calls us to play our part in His victory already won for us on the cross.

God showed Gideon how to worship. He had not had much training, for his father worshipped the idol Baal.

Gideon hurried to prepare his offering. God showed him what to bring (13:23).

- a) A grain offering of bread (Lev 2:1).
- b) A burnt offering (meat, Lev 1:3).
- c) A drink offering (broth).

"Putting the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot," he brought his offering and thrust it toward the angel (the Lord).

"The angel... said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth'" (Jud 6:19-20). Nothing was left to chance or for Gideon to decide. God always tells us how to worship.

God gave Moses very careful instructions when He told him how to build and worship at the Tabernacle:

- 1. In the sacrifices and offerings (Leviticus 1-7).
- 2. In the recipe for incense (Exodus 30:34-38).
- 3. In the detail of the priests' clothes (Ex 28:1-13).
- 4. In the washings to consecrate the priests (Ex 30:17-21).

Nothing was left for Moses, the man of God, to add (Rev 22:18).

### **TALK ABOUT**

- 1. God never left a man of faith to grope and find his own way to worship. Why?
- 2. How did Moses know what sacrifices and offerings to bring to God?

## **GOD ACCEPTED THE SACRIFICE**

"The angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of his staff." Fire flared from the rock and burned up the meat and the bread. Then the angel was gone! (6:21). God received Gideon's worship and offerings because he presented it in the way God had told him.

We offer what we have (Rom 12:1). It was what Gideon had in the house - meat and broth, bread baked without yeast (6:19). God accepts our gift. At the touch of His hand, the gift we bring becomes our worship, a sweet-smelling aroma to the Lord (Gen 8:21).

God said, "Worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness...bring an offering and come into His courts...tremble before Him all the earth" (Psalm 96:7-9). That is what Gideon did.

God knows when our worship is empty and without meaning. He said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15). Worship is a life lived for God.

It is possible for Christians to be holy, but only as they yield to the Holy Spirit's work in their lives. He longs to come to us in His fullness (Eph 5:18), and He does when we obey (Eph 4:30). He can only do this as we put sin out of our lives and put on holiness.

Are you being tested? God will accept your offering - the gift you have presented to Him. You offered, He will receive.

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. How would you answer Gideon's question?
2. Do we trust God's word and lean all our weight upon it?
3. What did the Lord do with Gideon's offering?
4. Is it possible for Christians to be holy all the time?
5. What part does the Holy Spirit play in keeping our lives pure?

## **GIDEON'S FATHER WORSHIPPED THE BAALS**

"Ah, Sovereign Lord," Gideon exclaimed, "I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face" (Jud 6:22-23). "But the Lord said to him, 'Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.'"

God offers men peace, not death (Jud 6:24; also 13:23; John 14:27).

Long before Israel came into the land, God told them, "When you enter the land...do not learn...the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who:

- a) Sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire.
- b) Practices divination or sorcery.
- c) Interprets omens.
- d) Engages in witchcraft or casts spells.
- e) Who is a medium or spiritist.
- f) Who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord..." (Deut 18:9-12).

"You shall have no other gods before Me," God told His people (Ex 20:4), but Gideon's father Joash worshipped at a Canaanite 'high place' in his town. He had built an altar to Baal and carved an Asherah pole to set beside the altar. Gideon had a problem!

Christian sons in heathen families have a problem. Gideon was not the eldest son, it seems, so he did not have to obey his father and share in his idol worship.

Gideon built an altar at the place where his father's idols had been. He used the poles he had cut down for wood and sacrificed two of his father's young bulls: one for his own sins and one for the sins of his people. (An editor's note says, "To this day it (the altar) stands in Ophrah...")

Gideon's bold strike against his father's Baal-worship shocked the town. Soon his families' enemies came buzzing out like angry bees.

"Bring out your son. He must die," they told Joash, "because he has broken down Baal's altar" (6:30). They wanted Gideon killed, but his father stood by his son. Joash showed these evil men how stupid they were to worship Baal.

"Are you going to plead Baal's cause?" he asked. "If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself..." (6:31). That day they gave Gideon a new name - Jerub Baal.

Gideon cleared the idols out of his town for a time. But before he could fight the Midianites, he had to teach his ungodly neighbours a lesson...idols cannot help us!

#### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Who protected Gideon's altar (Jud 6:24)?
2. What happened to the altar of Baal?
3. What question did Gideon's father ask the men of the town (Jud 6:31)?
4. Are you trusting some worthless charm to protect you?

### **EASTERN PEOPLES ATTACK ISRAEL**

"Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern people joined forces and crossed over the Jordan..." (Jud 6:33). They came into Israel and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. This was in the heart-land of Manasseh, near Gideon's own town. In spite of the angel's visit and God's sure promise, Gideon had no faith to fight them. He felt that he needed another sign from God, just to be sure.

"Don't be angry with me (for asking another sign)..." Gideon said to the Lord (Jud 6:39). God is not angry if we ask Him for a sign, just patient.

"Lord, I believe. Help me overcome my unbelief," the distraught father cried out to Jesus (Mark 9:24).

But Satan cannot take away what Christ has won for us. If we put Christ first in our lives and stand under His banner, the enemy will run (Is 59:19; James 4:7). Gideon still had to learn this.

#### **Read: Judges 7:1-25**

### **GIDEON'S MEN CAMPED AT SPRING HAROD**

God had prepared Gideon's heart, but would anyone follow this unknown son of Joash the Abiezrite?

Gideon was not well known, and he was not a proven leader.

"The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon..." (6:34). At his trumpet blast the men of Abiezer joined with him. Even distant tribes heard what Gideon had done to his father's idols. They heard in Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphthali, and God's Spirit moved men to follow Gideon into battle.

Early in the morning, Gideon (Jerub-Baal) and his men camped at the spring Harod, at the foot of the hill Moreh (Jud 7:1).

Harod means 'trembling.' The men had been gathering all night and there was a great company of them.

Midian's army spread out in the valley, feeling safe.

Have you ever had a task to do for God and had too many resources? When we have lots of resources, we may trust in them and not in God. The Lord must have the glory of victory (Jud 4:9). Our boast must be in the Lord and nothing else (1 Cor 1:31).

#### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Which people came to raid Israel?
2. Did Gideon want to go and fight them?

3. What did Gideon ask God for (Judges 6:39)?
4. Where did Gideon and his men camp (Judges 7:1)?
5. Were Gideon's men afraid?

## **THE FAINT-HEARTED WENT HOME**

Gideon told his men, "Those who shake in their shoes can go home."

If we feel like grasshoppers, we will act like grasshoppers (Num 13:33).

"With three hundred men I will save you..." God said to Gideon.

"Take them down to the water and I will sift them for you there." After God's sifting, three hundred men remained. Not many, but few become many when God is with them. These took over the equipment and provisions of those who went home (Judges 7:8-15).

God would encourage His young servant: "I am going to give it (the Midianite camp) into your hands," God told Gideon. "If you are afraid...go down to the camp with your servant...and listen to what they are saying." (7:9-11) Gideon and his servant went to the edge of the camp. They were close enough to hear a man talking to his friend: "I had a dream," he was saying. A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck a tent with such force that the tent fell down (7:13). When he heard the man's dream, Gideon fell on his face in worship. Then he and Purah his servant went back to the camp and called out, "Get up! The Lord has given the Midianites into your hands" (7:15).

He divided his three hundred men into three companies. Each man took a trumpet and an empty jar with a burning flax inside.

"Watch me," he told his men. "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do" (7:17). It was all part of God's plan.

Gideon and the hundred men came to the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch...they blew their trumpets and broke the jars and shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon" (7:20).

The trumpets' loud cry, the sudden light in the dark of the night and the shouting, sent the Midianites into a panic. "The Lord caused the men...to turn on each other with their swords" (7:22). All who remained on their feet ran for the fords of Jordan. "While each man (of Israel) held his position...the Midianites ran, crying as they fled" (7:21; Ex 14:14). Many times, God turned the enemy's swords upon themselves (7:23).

God's soldiers must 'stand and see' what God is doing (Ex 14:14). It is the Lord who fights the enemy - it is the Lord who makes the way for victory.

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. What did the Lord say about Gideon's army (7:2)?
2. What did Gideon have to tell his men (7:3)?
3. What did God tell Gideon to do to give him assurance (7:10-11)?
4. Why has God told us how to worship Him?
5. What did God tell Gideon to do (6:24-26)?
6. Was it right for Gideon to ask for a sign?

## **Read: Judges 8:1-21**

## **EPHRAIM HAD A QUARREL**

Ephraim had not heard the call to battle and they had not shared in the victory. They got no booty and no honour.

The men of Ephraim did not like being left out. "Why have you treated us like this?" they asked. Gideon gave a quiet answer (Proverbs 15:1). He replied, "God let you capture Oreb and Zeeb, the generals...of Midian. What have I accomplished compared to you? So they calmed down" (Jud 8:2-3 The Living Bible).

## **GIDEON'S MEN NEEDED FOOD**

Gideon and his 300 men had no strength left, but they still kept chasing the enemy. They came to the Jordan River at Succoth.

"Give my troops some bread," Gideon asked the leaders of Succoth, "they are worn out." He was still chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian. And he had to go deeper into Transjordan to catch them (8:5).

The men of Succoth would not help, so Gideon vowed to teach them a lesson when he returned. From there, Gideon went on to Peniel. Again he asked for food for his men. "But they answered as the men of Succoth. So he said to the men of Peniel, 'When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower'" (8:9).

The Midianite kings were hiding in Karkor, about 150 miles southeast of the Jordan fords. Gideon captured them and routed the entire army (8:12).

Then he went back to Succoth. There he caught a young man of Succoth and asked him who their leaders were? The ones who had refused him food for his men.

"The young man wrote down for him the names of the seventy seven leaders of Succoth..." (8:14). When Gideon knew who had insulted his men, "He took the elders...the men of Succoth and taught them a lesson...He also pulled down the tower of Peniel" (8:16-17).

At an earlier time, two kings of Midian had killed Gideon's brothers. He would not let them go now! Gideon told his oldest son to kill them, but the boy was afraid, so Gideon killed these enemies himself. And in doing this, he delivered Israel from the hands of the Midianites.

When Gideon returned home, his people said to him "Rule over us - you, your son and your grandson - because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian" (8:22; Genesis 23:6,11).

Gideon seemed to refuse this offer. He refused to be mayor of their town. "The Lord will rule over you," he told them, but he did not lead his clan to worship the Lord God. Instead, he did a very sad and foolish thing. He turned to his fighting men and said: "Each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder..." (8:24). It was custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings.

They were 'brothers' of the Midianites and fought with them. These kings rode camels. Around the camels' necks hung "crescents" or "little moons" threaded like a necklace; these kings worshipped Son the moon god.

His men "spread a garment, and each man threw a ring from his plunder on to it:"

- a) Earrings worn by the men of Midian.
- b) Ornaments and pendants worn by the kings.
- c) Gold chains from around the camels' necks.

Gideon took from them a great deal of gold. He "made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in...his town" (Jud 8:27). The meaning of "ephod" is not clear. It may have been an idol made of metal. He did not come against their idols. And in making this ephod of gold, he opened the way for the whole nation to worship his idol. "All Israel soon began worshipping it..." and it became a snare to him and his family.

## **GIDEON RETURNED TO HIS PEOPLE**

Gideon, whose heathen name was Jerub-Baal, went back home to live. "He had seventy sons...for he had many wives. His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech." The word may be a title. It may mean ruler, like the word 'Pharaoh' did in Egypt.



"Gideon, son of Joash, died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father in Ophrah..." (8:32). His people followed his idol worship. They set up Baal-Berith as their god. Baal-Berith was connected to a shrine at Shechem - a most ancient place in Ephraim where Abraham built an altar to the Lord (Gen 12:6-7). Joshua held his last assembly there.

"Israel no longer considered the Lord as their God, though he had rescued them from all their enemies on every side" (8:34 TLB). "They also failed to show kindness to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is Gideon) for all the good things he had done for them" (8:35).

## **THOSE WHO START WELL MUST FINISH WELL**

It is not enough to start the race well; we must run well to the end. Gideon did not do that. He began well, but he finished poorly, returning to the heathen gods of his forefathers.

Paul wrote,..."One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14). May you receive grace to do the same.

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. What did Gideon do when they asked him to be mayor of the town (8:24)?
2. How could a people God has helped turn away from Him so quickly?

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