

GIDEON, ALSO CALLED JERUBAAL

Judges 6-8

Background

Gideon makes a generic *oblation* or *grain* offering (a sacrifice of agricultural produce, such as wheat as an act of worship, typically accompanying a larger sacrifice) coupled with a *communion* or *burnt* offering (also an act of worship or atonement) of a young goat (*cf.* Ex 29:18, Lev 1:9+, Lev 2).

While Gideon was a lesser member of a lesser tribe, he nevertheless was probably of the upper class (*cf.* 6:27).

Short-Answer Questions

0. What is the number of the commandment the disobedience of which landed Israel in hot water?
1. True or False: Yahweh didn't do anything to tell Israel why things were going so wrong.
2. Were Gideon's fleeces intended to show him God's will or give him confidence in what he already knew?
3. What one word summarizes Gideon's response to God's clear, miraculous call? What one word summarizes God's response to Gideon's requests for signs?

Questions

4. Gideon's response to the angel's proclamation of hope was to offer sacrifices, specifically a communion and an oblation sacrifice. What would one in the new covenant offer as a corresponding sacrifice? (Hint: *cf.* Ps 51:16-17, Rom 12:1, Phil 4:18, Heb 13:15.)
5. Read I Sam 6:12-15, Judges 8:23. What was the most important difference between the monarchy and (1) the patriarchy, (2) the rule by judges?
6. You and crazy friends who started the bible study a decade ago have become the leaders of a small but growing religious movement. How do you set up the leadership and government of this movement, bearing in mind the caution of 8:23?
7. The defining attribute of the Israelites was their (vassal/suzerain) covenant with Yahweh. This guaranteed them protection and prosperity *if and only if* they accepted Yahweh as their God.
 - a) Moses describes in Deut 28 that iff Israel is obedient, it will receive tangible blessings, both protection and prosperity. Is this true of all who are bound in the covenant relationship with God, such as the New Covenant Christians?
 - b) Did Gideon misunderstand the angel's statement in vv. 6:12-13?
8. God reveals his will to Gideon through dramatic, miraculous revelation, and confirms it with miraculous signs. Gideon lived in an time when the Holy Spirit anointed a few, rather than indwelling a nation. How does God reveal his will to Christians of the new covenant?

Deborah

Court is in Session

Ladies and gentlemen of the study... Before your imagination's vivid eye sits Barak – captain of the Lord's army and in fact heralded for his faith in Hebrews. On the day in question he begs out of a duty unless a damsel by the name of Deborah accompany him. The court's decision is this: Is Barak's quid pro quo (of sorts) a legitimate request? Let us now establish the facts of Judges 4-5.

1. What is the relationship between Ehud's death and the Israelites' return to sin? (You may peek back at 2:10-23.)
2. Who was Deborah? Is there a special significance in her title as prophetess?
3. What is the primary responsibility of a judge? (It was more than just settling disputes)
4. What is specifically requested of Barak and by whom?
5. If it please the court may I now ask you the jury to recall other characters of the Bible who were politely pusillanimous (speaking now on behalf of the accused) in following God's command?
"Objection! Irrelevant."
"Your Honor I am merely setting the stage by showing the court that my client isn't the only one to have balked at a command of the Lord's – he is in fact in excellent company. I am here attempting to uphold his character."
"Objection overruled."
6. How did God "discomfit" (to use my favorite KJV word) Sisera and his chariots? (Check out the poetic version for other clues.)
7. What is Jael's motivation in killing Sisera?
8. What are certain tribes (mentioned in 5:13-18) rebuked? Is Deborah just being cranky?
9. Who is the woman Sisera is handed over to? This is prophesied in 4:9.
10. And now for the evening's denouement – Was Barak justified in his hesitation to proceed alone? Was he perhaps trying to gain moral support for his men? You be the judge.

Application: How many times do we either
(a) forget God's previous deliverances in the light of a new foe?
(b) balk when God calls us to do something unexpected?

JUDGES

1-3:6

Background

Judges was written after the people of Israel had entered Canaan, but before they had fully subdued it. This is following the death of Joshua, and before the monarchical period. The pattern repeated throughout the book is apostasy on the part of Israel, followed by crisis, and rescue by a heroic leader, or *judge* (Hebrew *shophtim* meaning judge or ruler or deliverer or savior¹). Twelve judges are described, both major and minor. The ideal judge was Gideon and the worst was his son Abimelech.

Judges is a book of cycles rather than strict chronology (note that chs. 16-21 precede 3-15), demonstrating the results of the last verse, 21:25: "in those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." The cycle is given by the five r's: rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration and rest.

The book was most likely written during the monarchical period, given the repeated phrase "in those days Israel had no king." According to 18:31 20:27, and 1 Sam 4:3-11 it was written after the Ark was removed from Shiloh. It is historically ascribed to Samuel, though this is uncertain.

The structure of the book is: Deterioration (1-3:6), Deliverances (3:7-16:31) and Depravity (17-21:25).

Questions

0. Read Heb 12:1-3, 11:32-34. Why should we study the judges?
1. Why (from the pericope) does Israel keep getting into trouble?
2. What other ways could God have protected his people? Why did he use judges?
3. How do the judges represent God's keeping his part of his covenant with the people of Israel?
4. In what ways are the judges different from earlier leaders, such as Moses or Joshua?
5. In what ways do the judges prefigure Christ?
6. In chapter 1, Adoni-Bezek was maimed in the manner he had maimed others. Is this simple justice, or is it morally wrong to punish by maiming? Is maiming ever used in modern society (apart from Arabia)? Does the use of maiming in this passage mean it should be considered for use in modern society?
7. We are called to be in the world, but not of it. The Israelites of this time, however, were called to segregate themselves from the world in order to remain untainted from it (read Ex 23:32). Why the difference? Should it be up to the individual whether or not to be cloistered?
8. God is described as taking an active hand in the punishment (or discipline) of Israel. This picture of God is seen on an individual level in Heb 12:4-8. Do you think that God actually makes bad things happen to us in order to teach or punish us, or does he just *use* bad things which would have happened to us anyway? (I.e., would God *give* someone cancer to teach him or her a lesson?) Try to think of personal examples one way or the other.

¹ The root denotes both ruling and settling disputes but also liberating and delivering.