

Gideon Passes a Test of Faith

Judges 6:25-32

Judges 6:25-32 - *"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.*

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 that 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." 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."

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!"

³² Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbabai saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."

³³ Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴ But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. ³⁵ And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

³⁶ So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said— 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." 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. ³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: 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." ⁴⁰ And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground."

Background Notes

The Lord called Gideon to fight the Midianites, the enemies of God's people. For seven years the Midianites had been raiding the land of Israel at harvest time and keeping Israel subdued by a scorched earth policy, so God called Gideon to deliver His people from the Midianites.

However, before Gideon could go out to defeat the Midianites in the strength of the Lord, his faith was to be tested. God tested Gideon's faith by commanding him to tear down his father's altar to Baal, and build an altar to the Lord in its place.

The worship of the pagan god Baal was idolatry. (By the way, "Baal" can be pronounced two ways: "bail" or "bah-ahl.") The multiple Baals, or the Baalim (that's the plural of Baal) were the pagan gods of the land. They supposedly controlled the weather and thus, the productivity and fertility of the land. Crops, fruit, and cattle were under their control. The religious rituals of Baal worship involved sexual prostitution - an obvious connection between sexual orgies and the fertility of the land. Baal worship was the major form of idolatry in the land of Israel during the time of the Judges, and it continued to be the primary pagan worship right on through the time of the kings of Israel.

When the Lord asked Gideon to pull down the altar to Baal, this was no small job! Altars to Baal were large stone constructions. Archeological excavations at tel Megiddo in Israel have revealed a Canaanite altar to Baal that measures more than twenty-five feet across and about five feet high. Notice here that it took ten men and a bull to pull down Gideon's father's altar to Baal. It was no small job!

The wooden image, or Asherah, represented the female consort of Baal. The worship of Asherah was also part of the idolatry into which God's people had fallen. The Asherah image was also to be cut down.

Doctrinal Points

1. God tests a believer's faith close to home.

Before Gideon could go out and prove his faith by fighting the Midianites, he had to prove his faith at home. The test of faith that God designed for Gideon involved being a faithful witness to his own family and in his own community. His faith was tested right at home before he could go on to accomplish bigger things.

This was no small test! Hard work was involved, and risk was involved. Apparently the entire community worshiped at the altar to Baal on Gideon's father's property, and the men of the city wanted to kill Gideon after he pulled down this altar (v30). At this point, Joash, Gideon's father intervened and stood up for Gideon. He said, "If Baal is a god, then Baal can defend himself!" So it appears that Gideon's faith resulted in his father's conversion. Joash was involved in pagan Baal worship - idolatry - but as a result of Gideon's test of faith, his father realized that Baal was a powerless idol. That's some of the good fallout of having your faith tested close to home - unsaved family members are brought to the Lord!

As Gideon's faith was tested close to home, so your faith will be tested close to home. How can the Lord call you to greater service if you're afraid to witness to your next-door neighbor, or your fellow student, or your colleague at work? Some Christians are too afraid to bow their heads in a restaurant or school cafeteria and thank the Lord for their food, let alone verbalize the gospel!

I remember a Christian friend with whom I worked some years ago. He told me that he wanted to serve the Lord, but he was afraid to meet with us for a noontime Bible study at work! How could God call him to greater service? God expects us to pass the test of faith in our own backyard. Before He calls us to greater service, God tests a believer's faith close to home.

2. God tests a believer's faith close to the heart.

As you know, "idols" are anything that takes the place of God in our lives. Something that comes before God on a Christian's priority list is an idol. If the Lord is not first in our hearts, then to a certain extent we're involved in idolatry!

Do you have any idols in your life? If that's the case, then you will never be successful in spiritual warfare. Do you see how that teaching is brought out here? The Baal must go before the Midianites can be fought. There can't be two altars in your life. Any altar to Baal must be torn down, or you fail the test.

The Lord will test your faith in an area that is close to your heart. Are there any idols there? Has success and the good life here in America taken the place of God in your heart? What about pleasure? What about your "things" - your possessions? What about your house, or your hobbies? God tests a believer's faith close to the heart.

Practical Applications

1. Let's be more than iconoclasts!

An "iconoclast" is one who destroys religious images or icons - an idol-smasher. Gideon was an iconoclast. *"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" (v28).* Gideon had destroyed the altar to Baal that his father had built, and Gideon had cut down the Asherah image and burned it.

Gideon was an iconoclast, but Gideon was **more** than an iconoclast. Obeying what the Lord had said, he not only tore down the altar to Baal, he replaced it with an altar to the Lord. *"... 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; 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" (v25-26).*

Gideon was more than an iconoclast, and we need to be more than iconoclasts as well. We must get rid of the idols in our lives. 1 John 5:21 says, *"Keep yourselves from idols."* Remember - anything that takes priority over the things of God in our hearts and lives is an idol. But we must do more than get rid of the idols in our lives! We must also build up the altar of the Lord. We must fill our lives with the things of God.

When God called Jeremiah, He told Jeremiah not only to pull down and destroy, but to also plant and to build (Jeremiah 1:10). Jeremiah, like Gideon, was more than an iconoclast. Jeremiah not only destroyed what was against God, but he planted and built up what was for God.

We should do the same. We should be more than iconoclasts! There are many applications here. How is your family life, for example? Are you tearing down ungodly worldliness that has crept into your family - and are you also building up the family with positive Bible teaching time?

What about your thought life - your intellectual life? 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, “*casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...*” Casting down anti-God arguments is important, but that’s just the start. We’re also to bring our “*every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!*” That’s being more than an iconoclast - that’s “setting your mind on things above.” Read Colossians 3:2 and Romans 12:2 about renewing your mind.

There’s a lot of application here. Let’s be **more** than iconoclasts!

2. Let's find a way to obey!

In verse 27 we read that Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did what the Lord had told him to do. However, because he too fearful of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night. This was a big test of Gideon’s faith, and he was afraid. He feared for his life! But even though he was afraid, **Gideon found a way to obey**. Yes, he pulled down the altar of Baal at night instead of in broad daylight - but the point is, **he did it!** Gideon found a way to obey, and God honored his timid faith. Gideon passed the test!

What about us? Are we finding ways to obey? For example, the Lord asks us to share the gospel with our neighbors and the people we work with. Are we disobedient Christians in this area because we’re fearful? Then find a way to obey! Here’s a suggestion: invite your neighbors over for a backyard barbeque and then give a nice little prayer of thanksgiving for the food - and include thanksgiving for the gospel in your prayer! It may start a conversation. Another suggestion: give your colleague at work a birthday gift. Find just the right Christian book for that person to read! Find a way to obey. It can be done!

Even though we are fearful, God expects us to obey. Let’s be like Gideon. Let’s find a way to obey!