

GIDEON

JUDGES 6-8

There's that saying 'the brightest star burns out the fastest'. Whether it's actually true or not in astronomical terms is debatable, but it's a point that's often made about people. Someone comes to everyone's attention—full of charisma and ability. They have such a promising start, and everyone has high hopes for their future, but then all of a sudden it all goes horribly wrong. They stumble and fall and then they become that person who is remembered with the thought, 'what a pity, he had so much potential'. We're going to learn about a guy who throughout his life looked like a bright star for Israel...

Read Judges 6:1-10

1. Describe Israel's situation at this time?
2. Comparing the opening of this story with the start of the Othniel, Ehud and Deborah stories, what differences do you notice?
3. 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 6:11-32

4. What kind of character is Gideon? What sort of mixed messages do you get?
5. What is Gideon told to do?
6. What does this episode tell you about the sincerity of the Israelites' cries to God?

Read Judges 6:33-40

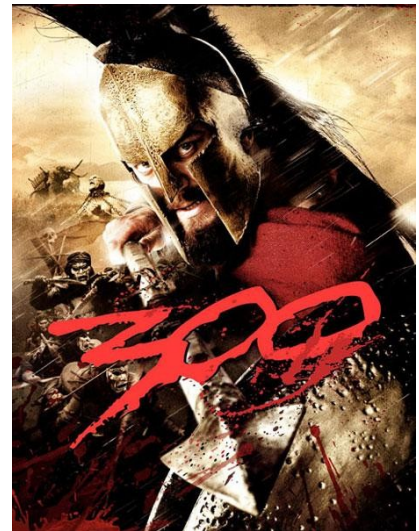
7. Why does Gideon put out his fleece? Is it appropriate?

Up until this point, Gideon should be seen in both a positive and a 'not-so positive' light. On the 'not so positive' - out of fear he's hiding in a wine press. When an angel appears to him, he seems a bit thick in not realising sooner that it's the Lord who is speaking to him. He follows God's instructs to destroy Israel's idols but he does it during the night out of fear. And he keeps asking God for a sign. But on the positive side, God calls him 'mighty' twice (v12, 14). He's a natural leader in that ten of his servants follow him to destroy the idols, and then a number of Israel's tribes get behind him to go into battle against the Midianites.

For Gideon there is a positive and negative side, but we should note that in the midst of his fear and hesitation, he's someone who is expressing a dependence upon God. He knows that he needs God to fight for him (v36) and he has shown whose side he is on. By his name, he's the one who is against Baal (v32).

Read Judges 7

8. Why does God send so many men home?
9. According to v10, should have Gideon hung around for this battle himself?!
10. What makes the battle such a success (v22)?
11. How would you describe Gideon's military tactics?



Read Judges 8:1-3

- 12 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

13. List all the times we are told that God acts in this chapter. What does this suggest to you?
14. How does Gideon's diplomacy with the people of Succoth and Peniel compare to his diplomacy with the Ephraimites?
15. What is Gideon's goal in this part of his military campaign (v18-19)?

16. Does Gideon's son remind you of anyone you've met earlier in the story?

The bright star of Gideon is starting to fade a little. 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. And the bright star is about to fade even more...

Read Judges 8:22-28

17. What offer does Gideon's success in his private war lead the Israelites to make?

18. In making this request, who would you say the Israelites are putting their faith in?

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. Consider your own life, the way you related to others, your relationships at church— If Gideon's basic problem surfaced in your life, what would that look like? How would it display itself?

21. What is God's ultimate solution to the problem of rebellion and unfaithfulness?

22. 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.