

# Gideon's Character

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[ 0 : 00 ] God can allow us to have great successes, great victory, to do great things for Him, and then somehow forget that it was God who did it.

! Because we've had glimmers of Gideon's character from the very beginning, this may be the true Gideon that we're seeing here.

And that doesn't minimize the great things God did. God can do great things even through the weakest of vessels. And so it doesn't minimize that at all and the great things that God did through Gideon.

Yet we may be seeing who really Gideon was at heart, his character. Regardless, it's not a good part of the story.

It really isn't. And so we see Gideon's character, I think, through the three, there are three primary movements here in the story, in the conclusion to Gideon's story.

[ 1 : 21 ] It begins with a request, a request from the people. All right? There's a request from the people. We see that very clearly. Then there's a response. There's Gideon's response. But then there is what I would call the result.

So there's a request. There's Gideon's response. And then there is the true result. The true result. The actual reality here of the story and of Gideon's character.

All right. So first of all, the request. The request. And it's straightforward, very simple. One verse. Verse 22. Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us.

Here's the request. Rule over us. That is, be our king. Both you and your son and your grandson also.

Not in the sense of king at the same time. But a monarchy in a sense. A monarchy and a dynasty in that sense.

[ 2 : 23 ] This is what they are requesting. For, and this is the important part of that verse. For you have delivered us from the hand of Midian. Now, at first glance, what's wrong with this request when you think about it?

I mean, hadn't Gideon proven himself to be a good leader? Really, he did. He was a good leader. Now he got kind of a slow start.

And reluctant at the first. And a few hiccups there in the beginning. And a few others that followed. But eventually, boy, what a leader he was.

Gideon was a great leader. And a great military tactician. Though, really, it was all by God's instruction. But hadn't he been a good leader? Hadn't Gideon led the people to a great victory? Certainly. Certainly. We read about that. Great victory. And so hadn't Gideon delivered the people from opposition of the Midianites? Certainly he had. He might make a great king.

[ 3 : 28 ] Gideon. Right? But there's a problem here. And several problems here. And in the first place, we might say that this was illegitimate.

This was illegitimate. Their request was for Gideon to be king of all Israel. But how could they have represented the entire nation?

And we were to understand that this is a delegation that has come to Gideon. And it just says the people. Be king. Rule over Israel. This was the request. And yet this was a delegation of people. And what right would they have to speak for all of Israel? And I would say that it's very likely, from the context for what has come before and what proceeds just immediately after, from the context, it's very likely that this delegation consisted only of Gideon's 300 men.

Because, you know, right after the request, Gideon then requests of these men what they had collected from their conquest.

[ 4 : 39 ] And so I think it's pretty clear. But even if you were to expand that and say at the very most, but understand that at the very most, the delegation could have represented only those tribes that were involved in the conflict.

And that would be far short of all of Israel. So this is an illegitimate request. In no way could they have represented the entire nation of Israel.

And so any kingship of Gideon would have been illegitimate for that one reason alone, as well as some others. And so second, I would say it was illegal. It was illegal.

His kingship would have been illegal. Their request for him to be king was illegal. And I say illegal in the sight of God. Because, you see, their request was a violation of the Mosaic law.

They said to Gideon, rule, you rule over us. And this was tantamount to the establishment of a monarchy in Israel.

[ 5 : 46 ] They didn't have anything like that before. This was really the very first suggestion of it. Now, we have that coming later. You know, the people asked Samuel, the last of the judges, we want a king like every other nation.

Remember that request? That's exactly what they got. They got Saul, poor king, just like every other nation. They got what came with it. All right, but this is the first suggestion of it here in Judges, albeit coming from a small percentage of all of Israel.

But this kind of maybe is a window into the overall thinking and desire of the people of Israel. But this request by these people, regardless of how many they were, was illegal.

According to Deuteronomy 17, verses 14 through 20, God is already, through Moses, already anticipating the desire that Israel would have for a king once they get into the land.

And this passage tells us that kingship over Israel would require God's divine choice. God would be the one to select the king, not the people.

[ 6 : 59 ] And this is what the Bible says in Deuteronomy 17, 14, When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me, you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses.

Okay, and he did, didn't he? He chose Saul. But it was a king that they deserved, not the one they really needed. But the point is that God is the one who appoints the kings over Israel, not the people.

And yet also we could say that they went even a step further in, you know, not only naming their own king, but they also desired to initiate a dynasty there in Israel.

They said, rule over us, both you and your son and your grandson also. So they're just kind of setting up Gideon and his offspring to be a dynasty of kings in Israel.

And they had no right to do this. It was illegal in the sight of God according to his law, according to the Mosaic law. So this request was illegitimate. It was illegal. And third, it was ill-conceived.

[ 8 : 16 ] Ill-conceived. What was their reason? This is the most important part of the passage. What was their reason? What was their motivation for asking Gideon and his sons to be their ongoing kings in the land?

What was their motivation? Well, it says right there, For you have delivered us from the hand of Midian. Really? Had he? Well, no.

Do you remember God's reason for whittling down Gideon's army down to, ultimately, down to 300?

Do you remember the reason God gave for that? In chapter 7, verse 2, And the Lord said to

Gideon, The people who are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into your hands.

Why? Lest Israel claim glory for itself against me, saying, My own hand has saved me. It's exactly what God said would happen and did happen, though they are actually giving Gideon, one of them, Gideon, the glory, the credit for delivering them from the Midianites.

And throughout the narration, God has said over and over, it's not Gideon and not the people. The credit for the defeat of the Midianites belongs to God and God alone.

[ 9 : 41 ] And so, the desire to crown Gideon will, it is ill-conceived. Ill-conceived. But there's something else wrong with their request, this request of the people.

And so forth, and I would say most importantly, it was ill-solicited. I know that's not a word, I made it up. It was wrongly solicited, all right, I'll put it that way.

And it may be difficult to see, but in actuality, it was Gideon who solicited this request that he rule Israel.

Now, he didn't solicit in words, but he did in actions. And there are many, many things that Gideon did that point to the fact that he wanted to be king. And ultimately did, if only in his own mind and in the minds of a small group of people, he did act as king. Act like a king.

[10:51] And to explain this fourth problem with this request, we need to move to the next movement in the story. And that is not only the request, but the response.

We see this in Gideon's response. His response to the request. And Gideon offers two responses to their request. One is verbal, clearly.

The other is nonverbal. It's nonverbal. And, you know, listen, Gideon's nonverbal response, in this case, carries much more weight.

It really does. And it provides, I think, a clear window into his mind and into his heart. His nonverbal response, that is, his actions, speak louder than words.

And you see, that's really the case with all of us. It is what we do. Not what we say that defines the truth in the heart. The truth, the reality of the heart.

[11:56] All right, so first of all, Gideon's verbal response. And even it has some problems, as I think we'll see. Verse 23. But Gideon said to them.

All right, here's his verbal response to their request that he be king. He said to them, I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you.

Now, that sounds pretty good, doesn't it? I mean, that sounds right. And it is right. Because, you see, the problem is not in what Gideon said.

There's not a thing wrong with that. Now, we might, as we shall see later, I think, have reason to call into question what he really believed about that.

But it's not in what Gideon said here. The problem is what Gideon did not say. Did not say. Gideon did not address the most egregious part of Israel's request.

[12:55] And that is their misinterpretation of the victory over their enemies. They misinterpreted that. Misapplied it. Gave credit to the wrong person.

Now, here's my point. Why didn't Gideon just come right out and say, I will not be your king. In the first place, God is your king. And in the second place, I'm not the one who rescued you.

I'm not the one who delivered you. It was the Lord who did that. Now, why didn't Gideon just say that? I think it's a, this, this, what's missing here is glaring.

And helps us understand, I think, what really is going on in Gideon's heart. And then, of course, his nonverbal response, I think, helps us understand that very clearly.

And so, let's consider Gideon's nonverbal response. His actions, I think, speak the loudest. As is true of all of us.

[13:58] What we do speaks loudest. And his actions, and I'm talking about his actions, the things he did before this request was ever given. And this takes us back into those verses that we looked at last time.

But also, and most importantly, his actions after the request. Before and after. And, you know, we can go back to verse 4 of this chapter, in chapter 8.

And go back to Gideon's pursuit of the Midianite kings, Zeba and Zalmanah, however you pronounce their names. And we go back to that, and this reveals the typical actions of a king.

Though he's not been asked to be king, he's not said anything about it, no one else has either. But the things he's doing here are indicative of royalty, of a king.

First place, he treated his own countrymen ruthlessly. We remember the story about Succoth and Peniel. And because we think they did a terrible thing, then we think, well, this is okay.

[15:11] But how he treated them and dealt with them, especially the people Peniel. These are the actions of someone who thinks he's king.

That he can do such things to his own countrymen. And then second, he reacted. You remember his brothers were killed by these two kings. And his reaction to the death of his brothers is actions that are indicative of royalty.

He treated these things as royal assassinations. Because he was requiring some kind of blood vengeance. In verse 19, he says, They were my brothers, the sons of my mother.

He's saying this to these two kings, remember, these Midianite kings. They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Lord lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you.

If you had let them... What right does he have to say these things? Unless he has some idea of kingship in an unofficial sense.

[16:18] And then third, he claimed for himself, and this is the most glaring example. He claimed for himself the symbols of royalty taken from the kings he executed there in verse 21.

The verse right before the verse that we started with. The Bible says, Gideon arose and killed Ziba and Zalmunna. And took the crescent ornaments that were on their camels' necks.

He took their royal insignias. And this would be the action of a king. It would be very typical of oriental kings in this day to do such a thing.

And this is exactly what Gideon did. And he kept these things for himself. See, these are actions that point to the thought processes of Gideon that, Well, look at all that I've done.

I deserve now to rule. To rule over the people of Israel. But we also need to look at the nonverbal response that comes after the request.

[17:23] The request to be king. First of all, he demanded, and we see this in the very next few verses. He demanded that each of his men give him a gold earring from their spoils of war.

Each of the 300 men, they took spoils. Took the earrings of these, because of their ancestry, Ishmaelites. Look again at what it says there in verse 24 and following.

You can just kind of get the picture here. Then Gideon said to them, I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder. For they had gold earrings because they were Ishmaelites.

So they answered, We will gladly give them. And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder. Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold.

Besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, purple robes, which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were around their camel's necks.

[18:26] These were golden chains around the necks of the royal camels. So he requested all of these things. Now by the protocol of the day in this culture, this was a symbol of their submission.

They were spreading out their plunder to give to their leader. That would be the protocol for one who was a king.

And it was to signify their submission to him. Now they highly revered him, no doubt about that. But this was a symbol of their submission to him as their king.

And then the amount of the gold is telling. See, the narrator is giving us these details, and he's giving these things to us for a purpose. He is allowing us to see the heart of Gideon.

The amount of the gold, 1,700 shekels of gold. That would be the equivalent of 43 pounds of gold. I don't know if any of you are gold buyers.

[19:27] A lot of people are buying gold these days. It's pretty expensive, isn't it? In our day. And I looked it up. This would be the equivalent of \$725,000 in our money.

Now in this day, we're talking about a huge amount of wealth. And this was a treasure fit for a king. It's mentioned here because of that.

Gideon thought he deserved that. Because I believe he was thinking in terms of kingship over Israel. And Gideon, again, kept the crescent amulets and the royal robes of the Midianite kings.

And these were symbols of royalty. And then second, Gideon crafted an ephod. It tells us there in verse 27. An ephod out of the golden earrings.

What did he do with all that gold? He crafted what the Bible calls an ephod. That's what it says there in verse 27. Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah.

[20:35] And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house. Now this is really troubling.

It's strange, too. I mean, what is an ephod? Some of you have read some of the Old Testament.

You have read about an ephod, or at least where it is found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

And an ephod of elsewhere, when you find it elsewhere in the Old Testament. An ephod referred to something worn by the priests.

The high priests, specifically. And it was a linen garment. And it had a breast piece. A special breast piece on it.

And that consisted of 12 stones sewn into the front of the garment. And it represented the 12 tribes of Israel.

[ 21 : 34 ] And there was a special pocket sewn in front that would hold the Urim and Thummim. Remember the Urim and Thummim? What were they?

I don't have any idea. We don't know what they consisted of. Yeah, they might have been holy dice. That's what some people think. But we know what they were used for. It was something that the high priests used to discern the will of God.

Now how that worked, we don't have any idea about that. But this was the ephod as it is presented other places in the Old Testament. But hold on.

This could not have been an ephod in that sense. You need to understand that an ephod of gold. This ephod of gold. Not linen with stones.

But an ephod of gold. Crafted by Gideon was something very different. Very different. And the problems it caused.

[ 22 : 34 ] Immediately in that verse. We see the problems this ephod caused. For Israel as well as for Gideon's household. This gives us a clue as to what it really was.

And there are some other grammatical and etymological. That is the origin of the word that helps us understand. This is something different.

It was a golden garment. It certainly was a garment. But very likely it was placed around an idol. And had really become a part of an idol. An idol. Probably of Baal. And again we can understand this from how the people responded to it.

What they did. Because of this golden ephod. The Bible says Gideon placed it in his city. In his city.

[ 23 : 33 ] He took it back there. Placed it there. And the Bible says that Israel played the harlot with it. Like the King James rendering.

They went whoring after it. We're talking about some immorality here. But immorality as associated. Is always used in association with idol worship.

So regardless of what it is. I'm suggesting to you. And there's every indication from a number of. For a number of reasons. That we're talking about an idol that was crafted here.

Out of this gold. I'm suggesting it was an idol. But regardless of exactly what it was. They worshipped it. The people worshipped it. And committed immoral acts.

Because of it. And before it. As a part of their worship of it. Which connects it very clearly. To the Baal worship.

[ 24 : 31 ] Of the Canaanites. The Canaanite idolatry. The Bible also says. That it became a snare to Gideon. It became a snare to Gideon. And to his whole household.

And so that just tells us. That Gideon apparently lapsed back into idolatry. After being used so mightily of God. And his whole household. Committed idolatry.

This is a sad story. It really is the conclusion to this incredible story. About Gideon. You know. The character of Gideon.

It's a sad. Sad. Ending. Not only to the story. But an ending to his life. And how could this happen? That's the question isn't it? How could this possibly have happened?

Well simple. Gideon just forgot God. He forgot God. Which is something we could do. He forgot God.

[ 25 : 29 ] Gideon elevated himself. To greatness. Totally. Misrepresented. And misapplied.

The great thing. That God. Did through Gideon. And when you forget God. And you elevate. Your own greatness.

Then you fall into idolatry. In whatever form it may take. You fall into idolatry. Even if it's just simply self-worship. And all of this.

Points to Gideon's desire. To rule Israel. No matter what he said. This was his desire. Now he may have said. Oh not me.

Oh no. But he thought. Yes. Me. I shall be king. And he acted accordingly.

[ 26 : 25 ] And so that leads to the third. Part of the story. The result. The result of all this. The request. The response. Verbal and nonverbal.

And the result of it. The result is. The Gideon acted like a king. He acted as if he were king. Albeit illegitimate. And illegal in sight of God.

And there are a couple of things. That we can see in the closing verses here. Before we get to the. You know. The usual kind of epitaph. Of what happens with Israel. And then it sets the stage.

For the next problem. And the next judge. But in the closing verses. That deal with Gideon. We see first of all. That he actually sat as a king. He sat as a king.

Verse 29. And watch this closely. Then Jerubal. And it's even telling by the way. That the author would again use that name. Because that's his. Canaanite-ish name. That's another indication. [27:24] That it's. You know. He's acting more like a Canaanite now. Then Jerubal. The son of Joash. Went and. And here's how it's worded.

In the New King James. Dwelt. In his own house. That sounds innocent enough. I think other. Versions like the. New American Standard. Perhaps. Says lived. Just uses the word lived. And indeed the word. Could be translated. Lived. Dwelt. But the Hebrew. Word there.

Literally means. To sit. To sit. And that's unusual. That that word. Would be used here. And the implication.

From this unusual language. Is this. That Gideon. Sat. As king. He sat as king.

[28:17] In his own house. Not just king over his own house. But. House in the sense of his city. In his place. He sat. As king. King. He.

To some extent. We don't know what. Because. Pretty soon. You know. He's going to lose. Even the favor of. Men. Of the people. They didn't even. Treat him kindly. The point is.

What it. What. Gideon thought of himself. And he sat. As a king. There. And. Even though. His kingship. Was. Illegitimate.

And then also. He. Lived. As a king. He lived. As if he were a king. Verse 30. Gideon had. Seventy sons.

Who were his own offspring. That's a lot of sons. Doesn't mention the daughters. I don't know how many kids he had. Seventy sons. Who were his own offspring. For he had.

[29:12] Many. Wives. So if you have something. You say. Well it's character. Not too bad. He's certain was stupid. He had many wives. And.

His. Concubine. Who was in Shechem. Now. Understand. It doesn't necessarily mean. He just had one of those. There just was one in Shechem.

Now this is unusual. Had a concubine. Not his wife. Now in. In. You know. The culture of. Of Israel. In these days. And you know.

Solomon of course. Had many wives. And there. Were others. Had many wives. More than one wife. And some who had concubines. And a concubine. Was kind of a. Second wife.

And if you couldn't have children. With. One wife. You were allowed. A concubine. To have offspring. Through the concubine. But this is not what this is. Talking about. This concubine.

[30:07] Didn't live in his house. As one of his wives. She lived in another city. And she had a son. Whose name.

He called. Abimele. All right now. To have many wives. Let's just take that first of all. To have many wives. Like this. And many sons.

Is the mark of royalty. Among the nations. It is a dynasty. That. Gideon is forming here.

To be king. And his son's king. Grandson's king. After him. Forget the fact. That that never happened. Only. Think. That this is what.

Gideon's desire was. This is a window. Into his character. That many. Wives. Was a mark of royalty. And to have. Concubines.

[31:04] And to have. A concubine. In addition to. So many wives. Was also unusual. She was little more. Than a harlot. That he had.

You know. Tucked away. In another city. And so I guess. You know. The idea. The implication is. He goes on a little. Business trip. Over to Shechem. And he's got a woman. There too. And she's not his wife.

She's a quote. Concubine. And she has a son. And Gideon named. This son. By this woman. Abimelech. It's interesting.

The word Abimelech. It really is a. One of those. Sentence words. As many. Many were. And it's a combination. It's a combination. Of not only Hebrew. But also Canaanite.

In the name. Malak. And when you put it all together. It means. The king. Is my father. The king.

[32:01] Is my father. Who was his father? Gideon. The king. Gideon. Is my. Father. Now. What a terrible.

Conclusion. To the story. Gideon. You know. We've had some exciting. Parts in the story. And some great things. Great victories. Great things. That God has done. And it's exciting.

And even. Many parts. Of. Of. Of. Gideon's life. And what he. How he. The part he played. And things he did. God did through him.

Exciting. And then we have this. Terrible. Conclusion. To his life. Now. There are many lessons here. I guess. You know. If I spent. Maybe a little more time.

I could come up with. More than one. But there's one. That I want to give you. And that is. You know. No matter. How faithful you've been.

[ 32 : 57 ] To the Lord. No matter how. Mightily God has used you. In life. What's important. Is how you end. What's important.

Is that you end well. You ever thought about that. In your Christian life. Have you ever known. Some men of God. And women of God. Who. Just been. You know.

Mighty men. And women of God. And faithful. And prayer warriors. And great leaders. And. You know. Maybe even. Has been a mentor to you. In some sense.

Only. To see them. Just fall. By the wayside. At the. Close to the end. Of their lives. Get off out of there. And left field. And say.

This is not even. The same person. It can happen. And does happen. That happened with Gideon. I think. And so. It's important. To end well. And.

[ 33 : 53 ] It reminded me. Of something. Paul said. First Corinthians. Nine. Twenty-six. He said. I do not run aimlessly. He's using. A runner. And then also. A fighter.

A boxer. As kind of. Metaphors. And analogies. Of the Christian life. He says. I do not run aimlessly. I do not fight. Like a boxer. Beating the air.

But I discipline. My body. Discipline myself. And make it. My slave. Not me. Its slave. So that. After I have.

Preached to others. I myself. Will not be disqualified. Paul was. Very concerned. About how. How he ended.

That he ended. Well. And again. We can do great things. For God. And. Be faithful people. And. See God do great things.

[ 34 : 46 ] In our lives. But if we don't end well. What a tragedy. And that was the case. I believe. With Gideon.