

• *Gideon – both strengths and weaknesses*

1. He was able to give a soft answer in a time of criticism

• *Chose not to react with a violent spirit*

2. He was able to show great determination when others had no faith in him

• *Confidence in God*

3. He was able to persevere to the very end of what he was being called to do.

• *Gentleness and determination*

Gideon's weaknesses

Gideon was always 'a human being just like us' (as James might have put it – see James 5:17). His strength was made perfect in his weakness. Sometimes he is a wise leader; sometimes he is a man of obvious weakness and inclined to make precisely the kind of mistakes we might ourselves have made. At first, he shows himself to be a man of wisdom but soon his weaknesses appear.

1. **He was able to give a soft answer in a time of criticism.** When the Midianites ran to escape what they thought was Gideon's mighty army, they ran in the direction of the Ephraimites whose territory was to the south of Gideon's own tribe of Manasseh. Since they were running in that direction, Gideon asked for the help of the people of Ephraim, in addition to the three tribes who were already involved in the battle. They were in a position to guard the river-crossings and so they were able to kill two of the escaping generals of the Midianite army ^{☞1}. But it leads to some complaint. The Ephraimites were bitterly critical of Gideon for not having called upon their help earlier ^{☞2}. Gideon could have reacted violently (as Jephthah did on a similar occasion in later years – Judges 12:1–6) but he chose to preserve the peace by not reacting with a violent spirit. He simply pointed to the major part that Ephraim had played in the final victory. They had defeated two of the enemy's generals ^{☞3}.

2. **He was able to show great determination when others had no faith in him.** Gideon and his three hundred men gave chase after two Midianite kings. They were weary and so asked the help of the people of Succoth ^{☞1}. But the people of Succoth had no faith in Gideon's small army ^{☞2}. Gideon however was quite confident he would defeat the two kings; then he would return to punish those who would put no faith in him but wanted to wait until his victory was so obvious no faith was needed ^{☞3}. Something similar happened at Peniel ^{☞4}.

Gideon had faith in God ('. . . Yahweh has given Zebah and Zalmunna...') and therefore faith in himself ('... into my hand...'). At a time when no one believed in the victory that was to be given him, Gideon was still confident because he was confident in God.

3. **He was able to persevere to the very end of what he was being called to do.** The Midianites were now severely reduced in number. Only fifteen thousand were left; a hundred and twenty thousand had perished ^{☞1}. Gideon continues to press his advantage to the very end, attacking the armies while they are off-guard, pursuing their leaders, and reducing the enemy armies to chaos ^{☞2}.

Gentleness, determination, perseverance. These are the last times we shall have cause to admire Gideon. For the rest of his story, he appears in his weaknesses rather than in the strengths that arose from his faith.

1. It soon appears that there is a **strand of ruthlessness** in Gideon's character that now begins to show itself. He returns from battle ^{☞1} and compels a young man to write for him the names of the officials and elders of Succoth ^{☞2}. Soon he scourged the elders of Succoth with thorns and briars^{☞3}. Then he destroyed a tower in Peniel as he said he

^{☞1} 7:24-25
^{☞2} 8:1
^{☞3} 8:2-3

^{☞1} 8:4-5
^{☞2} 8:6
^{☞3} 8:7
^{☞4} 8:8-9

^{☞1} 8:10
^{☞2} 8:11-12

^{☞1} 8:13

^{☞2} 8:14

1. A strand of ruthlessness

- Over-confident

2. A strand of vindictiveness

- Revenge

- Ambition

- Ceases being merciful

- Bible heroes of faith are scarcely ever unblemished

- All are fallible and imperfect except Jesus

- Gideon's strong point - his faith in God

- Encouragement and challenge from the example of Gideon

would ⁴ and then went further still killing the men of the city ⁵. The man who once had thought himself not to be a 'mighty man of valour' has now become too confident in himself and has moved from indecisiveness to arrogance.

2. Also a **strand of vindictiveness** appears in Gideon's character in his dealings with Zebah and Zalmunna. When he finally corners these two Midianite kings, he kills them not because of their enmity to God, but in revenge for the killing of his own brothers ¹. Gideon even wants his own young son to have a part in taking family-revenge against the men who killed those who were Gideon's brothers and Jether's uncles ². At one time Gideon did not think himself to be a mighty man of valour and was afraid of his own father ³. Now he expects a younger boy to have greater courage than he had when he was that age! It seems that Gideon is getting increasingly ambitious to have a family who aspire to be military heroes and rulers in Israel. As we shall see, in addition to Jether he has a son named 'My father is king' (Abi-melech)! Gideon was generous and wise in dealing with the people of Ephraim but he is never seen being merciful at any later stage of his story.

His son is unable to kill his uncle's murderers. Gideon's enemies scornfully tell him to do the job himself – and he does ¹.

Scarcely ever in the Bible do we find that the heroes of faith have an unblemished record. Many of them start out well but deteriorate towards the end of their lives. Anyone who reads much in the historical books of the Old Testament finds again and again that the people he or she begins to admire turn out to be disappointing. Every institution, every character, every king, every man or woman of faith turns out to be fallible and imperfect. There is only one Person in the Bible who never fails and never disappoints and that is Jesus. Only one Person really did endure to the end with an unblemished record. Only one Person really deserved to be our hero, the Lord Jesus Christ. Gideon's strong point was not anything in himself. He had one strong point – his faith in a strong Saviour-God.

Yet there is something encouraging in all of this. If God can use fallible people like Gideon, then God can use me and God can use you. And if Gideon's faith challenges us to be a 'mighty person of valour', his weakness might challenge us to hate vindictiveness and leave revenge to God.

³ 8:15
⁴ 8:16, see 8:8-9
⁵ 8:17

¹ 8:18-19
² 8:20

³ see 6:12,27

¹ 8:21

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