

• *Gideon was a weak person*

1. God's training for Gideon – practice with a small venture

• *Commanded to tear down his father's altar to Baal and replace it with an altar to Yahweh*

• *Obedience – but in the middle of the night*

• *God honours Gideon's faith by giving him his father's support*

• *Prepared for greater things*

2. God is gracious to Gideon's sign seeking

Gideon was a weak person. He could get into moods of scepticism and doubt. He could be almost overcome with unbelief.

1. **One way God had of training Gideon was to give him practice in a smaller venture of faith before giving him the bigger venture of faith.** God gradually brought Gideon up to a high level of faith. Gideon himself is one of the weakest believers there ever was! His first reaction to God's call was one of scepticism and unbelief – and throughout his story he is prone to lapses into unbelief.

God helps Gideon to come to a higher level of faith by giving him something smaller to do at first. He is asked to break down his father's altar ¹. He had already built one altar. Now God asks him to build a second altar. He must take a bull from his father's herd, break down his father's altar and build an altar of worship for Yahweh on his father's farm. Then he must sacrifice his father's bull ². It would be a dangerous thing to do. To tear down an altar to Baal – the god of fertility – at a time when everyone was worshipping Baal was to ask for trouble. His father was a Baal-worshipper; there was not much chance that his father would be pleased to discover what Gideon had done.

Gideon did as he was told ¹, but he did it in the middle of the night when nobody was around to see what he was doing! Well, almost nobody! Actually he made use of ten servants. Asking ten men to keep a secret like that was to ask the impossible. The next day it does not take long to find out who it was who had broken down the altar to Baal and replaced it with an altar to Yahweh ². Soon the men of the town were threatening to kill Gideon ³.

God honours Gideon's faith. At this point God does something unexpected for Gideon. The first Baalite idolater he won round to the worship of Yahweh was his own father! The one he had feared so much ¹ actually turns around and supports his son. He was obviously a powerful and influential man. Even Gideon was afraid of him. But he is unexpectedly won over to the cause of Yahweh. 'Let Baal defend himself!' says Gideon's father ². When we honour God, God honours us. Gideon learns that when he takes a step of faith – however fearful he might be at the time – God will honour him and unexpected blessings are likely to follow. Gideon gets a new name ³. He becomes known as JerubBaal ('Let Baal contend!'). It would be a permanent reminder to Gideon that Yahweh could change situations. 'Let Baal contend' if he can – but he can't!

So Gideon has been given a small step of faith to take. It prepares him and trains him to do greater things for God.

2. **God is gracious to Gideon's 'sign-seeking'.** Gideon is so afraid that he might do something wrong or take a false step. He has already (see 6:17) once asked God to give him a special sign to confirm that what he is doing is authentic. Now he does the same thing again.

¹ 6:25

² 6:26

¹ 6:27

² 6:28-9

³ 6:30

¹ see 6:15, 27

² 6:31

³ 6:32

• *Gideon assembles his army to fight the Midianites*

The Midianites and their friends assemble at the valley of Jezreel, a valley in the north of Israel branching westwards off of the Jordan valley through which the River Jordan runs ^{¶1}. Gideon receives a fresh empowering from the Holy Spirit. He summons the Abiezrites, the people of the area around Ophrah ^{¶2}. Then he called for help from three of Israel's tribes, the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali ^{¶3}.

¶1 6:33

¶2 6:34

¶3 6:35

• *Gideon is nervous and requests more signs*

At that point Gideon again gets nervous. Hundreds of people are now looking to him as their leader. He has summoned them. Will he be able to lead them into victory? Once again, Gideon feels very doubtful, and again he asks for sign. First he asks for a miraculous sign that God really is about to give him success. He asks God to arrange for a fleece of wool to be wet with dew while the ground around is dry ^{¶1}. God answers and Gideon gets the sign that he wants ^{¶2}. But still he is not satisfied. This is the trouble with sign-seeking. Once you ask for one you want another to make you sure about the first one! So Gideon asks for the sign to be the other way around. The fleece is to be dry and the ground around is to be wet with dew ^{¶3}. Again God answers, and Gideon is given what he wants ^{¶4}.

¶1 6:36-7

¶2 6:38a

¶3 6:39

¶4 6:40

• *God answers*

1. *No sign but Jesus for unbelievers*

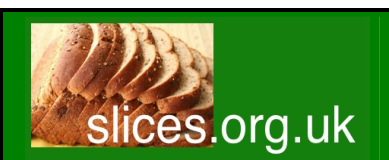
1. God will often refuse to give unbelievers a sign. An evil and adulterous generation seek a sign but no sign shall be given them except the resurrection of Jesus Himself. Jesus Himself is the sign for those without any faith at all.

2. *God may sometimes give signs to help weak believers*

2. Yet when weak believers need help, God might be willing to confirm His will by giving something that doubly demonstrates what His will is. God answered Gideon's requests for a sign, and gave him what he asked for. This is not a sign of how strong Gideon is; it is a sign of how weak he is! God sees that Gideon is so weak that he needs a sign; so He lets Gideon have what he needs.

3. *When God does confirm his will there is a heavy responsibility to obey*

3. When God does confirm His will it puts the Christian under heavy responsibility. When we have the word of God and something in addition to the Word of God, then our responsibility to obey it is heavy indeed. We are in a very serious situation if God makes doubly clear to us what His will is. To whom much is given, much is required. If God makes doubly clear what His will is, we must be doubly eager to obey it.



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