

## *Gideon Empowered by God for Mighty Things*

### *The Bible Study*

What you will need:

- Bible, pen and note pad for each participant
- A stone to add to the altar. Stone to have the word "Peace" on it.
- A verse - entitled "Peace" to give to group members to take home.



Judges 6-8

"And Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and named it Yahweh-Shalom (which means "the Lord is peace"). The altar remains in Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer to this day." Judges 6:26 (NLT)

#### **Wool over Your Eyes**

Have you ever wondered why we say "pull the wool over your eyes?" The standard story about "to pull the wool over one's eyes" traces the phrase to the wigs commonly worn by men (especially judges and attorneys) in the 18th century. A judge fooled by a clever lawyer would be said to have the "wool" (slang for a wig) pulled over his eyes, blinding him to the facts of the case.

#### **A Pun in Time**

A stitch in time saves nine or so the saying goes. It can be an interesting exercise for a group to explore why we use certain words or phrases to express ourselves. The group or individuals may also enjoy sharing puns they have heard or make up about things to do with sheep. E.g. "There will never be another you—EWE."

#### **What Happens When We Pray**

At the end of each day it is good to practice a discipline called Examen. As you lie in bed getting ready to fall asleep, turn your thoughts to God and what He sent your way that day. Think about the thing for which you are most grateful. How did that help you grow spiritually? Then think about the thing for which you were least grateful. How did that help you grow spiritually? Think about what fed your soul and what robbed your soul. Listen for what God would say to you. Before you get up the next morning pray and ask God to help you be aware of His Presence and plan for the day.

#### **What Happens When Children Pray**

The time spent helping children get ready to sleep is an important part of the day for parents to bless their children with good habits. Quiet time devotions with the children include teaching them to pray. This time spent will also give them a natural time to process and talk about some of their worries. Be intentional about this opportunity to teach the children how to pray. Ask them what they liked most about the day. Ask them what they liked least about the day. Allow them to talk about how the next day could be better.

#### **Piece Makers**

Think about a play on words for peace makers. Quilt makers sew pieces of material together to make quilts. They are called piece makers. Many quilt makers sew in love by making their quilts for people with special needs. As the quilts are made the group prays for the people who will be covered by this gift. Some of the people in your corps may be interested in becoming Piece Makers for Jesus. The items made could be small baby quilts, wall hangings, or even larger covers for a bed of someone in a hospital.

#### **Let There be Peace on Earth**

The first altar that Gideon built was called, the Lord is Peace. The peace sacrifice or offering was to indicate the desire of the giver to become a "friend" of God or be acceptable in God's eyes. Only a blood sacrifice was acceptable. When the angels appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus, they began the message by saying, "Glory to God and peace on earth." God sent His Son, His Lamb offering to make the ultimate peace offering. Only the blood sacrifice of Jesus could bring lasting peace between God and mankind. Peace is evidence that the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives. We refer to it as one of the "fruits" of the Spirit. How can we bring peace to the people of our community? As a group, spend time in prayer for your community to receive true peace. Pray and ask God to show your corps how to be peace makers. Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called the children of God.

After a quick scan of the first chapters of Judges we can understand why the people of Israel were under the control of the Midianites (chapter 6) and why they needed someone to rescue them. Throughout Scripture we notice that God often uses the most unlikely people to work out His plans. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he had just finished threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress. He was hiding the grain from his enemies. This could appear to be an act of a coward or it was the act of a wise man. The angel began his conversation with this greeting, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you." This could have sounded like a Tui ad to Gideon. He may have been thinking, "yeah right!" When he answered, "If the Lord is with us, then why does He allow the Midianites to dominate us?"

Let's read Judges 6 verses 11-24.

Looking closely at the exchange between Gideon and the angel of the Lord note that when Gideon first replies to the speaker he politely calls him "sir" before he considers the part of the statement claiming that God was with him. There is some indication that Gideon had been thinking of the Lord when he brings up examples of God's deliverance of the people in the past. We do not have a lot of information about Gideon. Was he a devout man or uncommitted in his convictions? Was he a cynic or a student? Was he a disciple or a doubter? We do not know much about his state of mind, but we do know that he was open to hear what this stranger had to say.

In verse 14 the visitor is now described as the Lord rather than the angel of the Lord. "Then the Lord turned to him and said, 'Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!'" (NLT) Gideon's reply indicates that he has recognized that his visitor was someone special. The reply is no longer just a polite "sir" it is now an acknowledgement that his visitor is worthy of great respect. Gideon dares to challenge the words of this visitor and gives his excuses as to why he cannot be the one to rescue Israel. Gideon reveals that he is from the tribe of Manasseh and that he is the youngest son. Surely the Lord would choose to use someone from one of the larger tribes and an older son not the youngest. The Lord tells Gideon that He will be with him and give success to the mission. Gideon wanted proof that this stranger was the Lord. He asked the stranger to wait there for an offering. The Lord agreed to accept the offering. Gideon came back with a cooked goat, some broth and some unleavened bread. The Lord instructed him to put it on a rock. The Lord touched the offering with the staff in His hand and the offering was consumed by fire. The Lord disappeared. Gideon knew the Lord had visited and he was filled with fear. The Lord spoke to Gideon and assured him he would not die. Gideon built an altar at the spot and called it Yahweh Shalom, meaning the Lord is Peace.

God instructed Gideon to take his father's second best bull and pull down the altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. He was to build a new altar according to the specifications God gave. Then Gideon was to use the wood from the Asherah pole to make a fire and sacrifice the bull to God. Gideon obeyed, but he did this at night because he was afraid of the response of the other members of his family and the town people. The encounter with the town people ended when Gideon's father told them the matter was over. They should let Baal defend himself. Gideon the "mighty hero" was beginning to emerge. Shortly after this the armies of Midian and Amalek made an alliance and came to fight Israel. It is interesting how the Bible describes what happened next. Read verse 34, "But the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon with Himself and took possession of him, and he blew a trumpet..." (Amplified Version) "Then the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon. He blew a ram's horn as a call to arms..." (NLT) "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet..." (NIV)

The warriors responded to the blowing of the shofar. A shofar was made from a ram's horn and was blown to call people to assemble for worship, instructions and war. Gideon started to get worried as the battle approached. Would God really deliver them? He asked for two signs. He laid wool from a shorn sheep on the ground and asked that if God was really going to give victory the wool be wet and the ground stay dry. The second time he asked that the wool stay dry while the ground was wet. God answered Gideon's request.

We read in **chapter 7** that God tells Gideon the army is too big and the army would boast that they delivered Israel. All who were timid or afraid were allowed to leave. Twenty-two thousand went home. That left ten thousand who were willing to fight. God said that was still too many. This time they were sorted out by how they drank water. Three hundred men were left. Gideon obeyed God's strange orders. He collected the provisions and sent the rest home. One more time God assures Gideon that victory would belong to Israel. He is told to go near the enemy's camp for confirmation. Gideon went there and overheard one of the men telling about his dream. His friend told him that his dream meant God had already given the victory to Gideon. After hearing the conversation, Gideon returned to his camp and gave orders to his army of three hundred. He divided them into three groups, and gave them all a ram's horn and a clay pot covering a lit torch. At the signal they were to blow their shofars, break the clay pots so that the torches would shine out, and yell, "For the Lord and for Gideon!" They took their places just after midnight and on the signal all the men did as they were instructed.

The Bible tells us that God caused the warriors in the camp to fight against themselves. Those who were not killed in that battle fled. Gideon sent word to the surrounding tribes to come and help chase the enemies of Israel and defeat them. **Chapter 8** describes the mixed reception that Gideon received from the other tribes. He was able to use diplomacy to

placate the men of Ephraim. He did not get support from Succoth or Peniel and had to deal with them harshly after the battle was finished.

The Israelites asked Gideon to rule over them and he refused saying that the Lord would rule over them. He did ask them to each give one earring out of the plunder taken from the enemy troops. He used the gold to make a sacred ephod. What is meant here is not clear. Usually an ephod is a part of the priestly garment, like a breastplate. When designed for the High Priest it was a breastplate that represented the twelve tribes of Israel. The High Priest wore it over his heart as a symbol to remind him to pray that the people of Israel would love and serve God with all their hearts. Perhaps Gideon sought to design something to remind the people of Israel to love and serve God and forsake their idols and false gods. Then after a while the people came to worship the ephod and it was an idol trap for them. It stands as a warning for each of us that we must be on our guard to keep God first in all we do. Even good intentions can trap us and lead us away from God.

Give thought to how God can use you to change the world. Then pray and ask God to give you the power to trust and obey Him. It is amazing what God can do with us when we trust and obey.

Hand out the Peace verse for members to take home. **Peace**. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be **calm in your heart**. (unknown)