

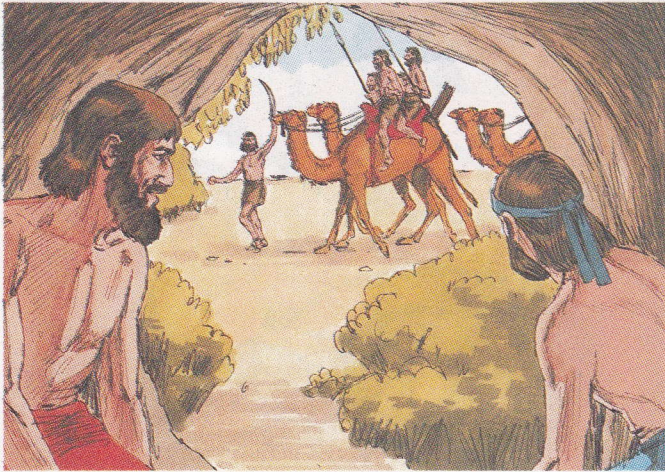
God Chooses Gideon



1 Once again the people of Israel sinned against the Lord by worshiping the gods of the Canaanites. To punish the Israelites, God let the people of Midian rule over them and ruin their land.



2 Every year when the Israelites planted their grain, the Midianites came like a cloud of locusts and attacked them. They destroyed the grain and took away their sheep and cattle, leaving nothing for the Israelites.



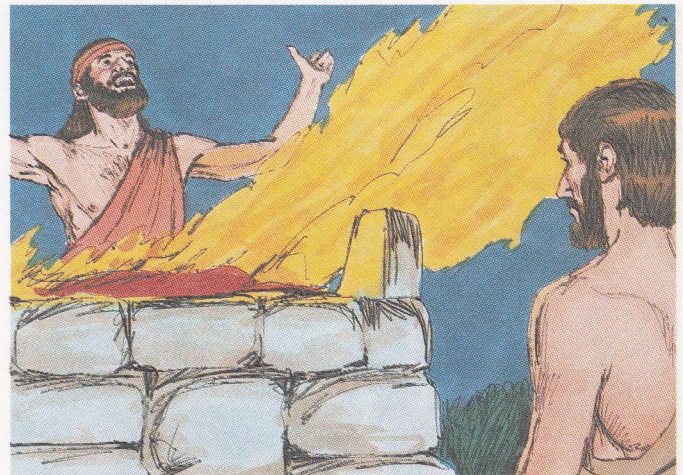
3 The Israelites were completely helpless against the Midianites, and so they hid in caves and other safe places in the hills. Finally, after seven years, they cried out to the Lord for help against the Midianites.



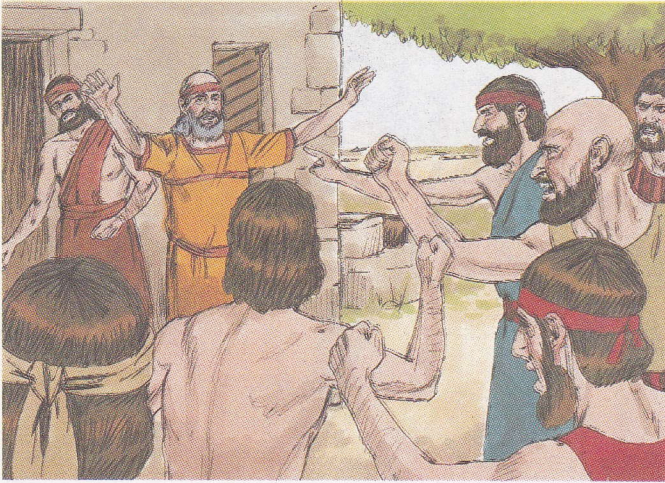
4 Then the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon the son of Joash in the village of Ophrah: "Go, rescue Israel from the Midianites. I myself am sending you." The Lord told Gideon what to do first.



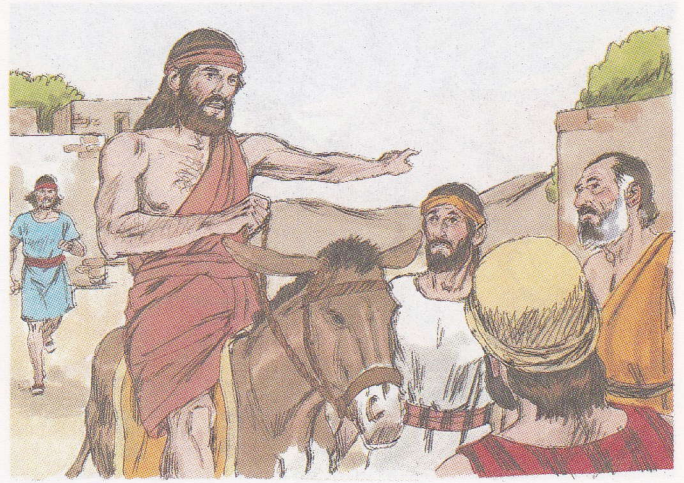
5 That night—for he was afraid of being seen—Gideon and his servants tore down his father's altar to the god Baal. They cut down the pole beside it, which was a symbol of the goddess Asherah.



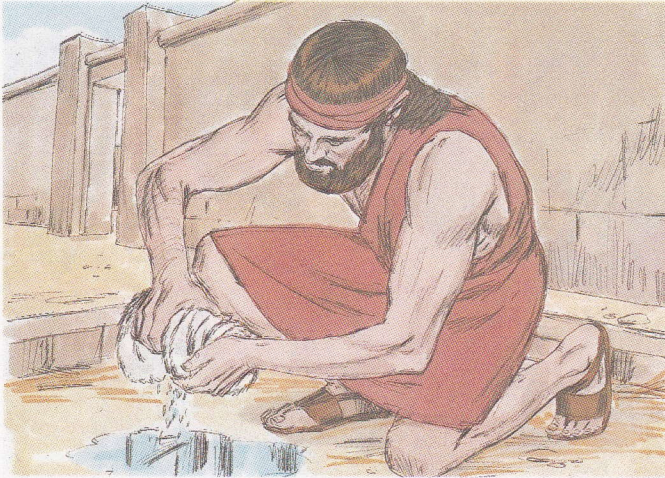
6 Then Gideon built a new altar to the Lord at that same place. He offered a bull as a sacrifice to God. Gideon used the Asherah pole as firewood to burn the sacrifice.



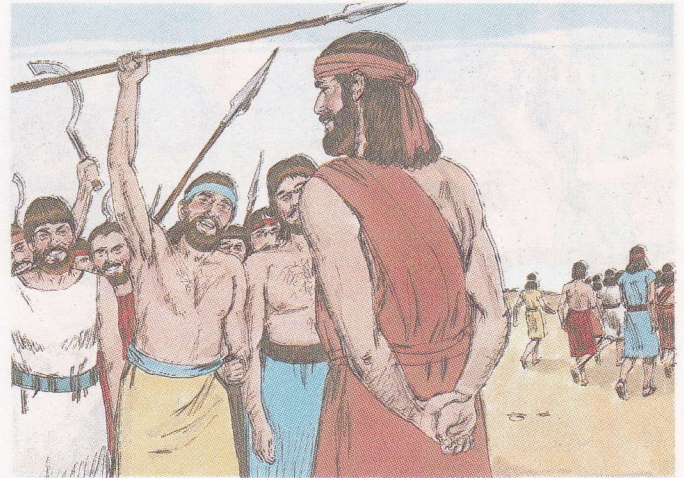
7 The next morning the people were furious and wanted to kill Gideon. But Gideon's father said, "Are you defending Baal? If Baal is a god, let him defend himself." So they let Gideon alone.



8 Then news came that the Midianites and Amalekites had crossed the Jordan River into the Jezreel valley. Gideon sent messengers to the men of Israel to come and help fight them.



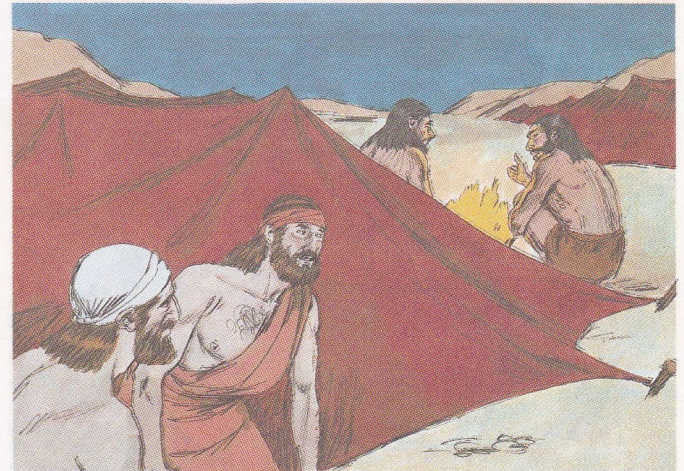
9 Gideon asked God for signs so he could be sure of God's help. First, God made some wool wet with dew while the ground around it was dry. Then he made the wool dry while the ground was wet.



10 God said to Gideon, "You have so many men that you may think you have won this victory by yourselves. Send away anyone who is afraid." Gideon did so, but still 10,000 men remained.



11 So God said, "Take the men to the stream and send home all who get down on their knees to drink." Then only 300 men were left. God said, "I will give you victory over the Midianites with only 300 men."



12 God sent Gideon to spy on the enemy camp. In the darkness, Gideon crept close and heard a soldier explaining his friend's dream: "It means that God has given the victory to Gideon!"