

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!
 "Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Questions # 21

What is the Trinity?

Why Should We Care?

John 14:25-29

Matthew 28:18-20

June 11, 2017

Trinity Sunday

Communion: Wayne Webb

Care Calling: The Saunders

Host: Betty Aytes

Saturday 6/10 Clean Up: The Webb's

- 1 🎵 How Majestic [DH 2238]
- 2 🎵 33 - Immortal invisible God only wise [ALL] 33
- 3 🎵 191 - Father I Adore You [ALL] 191
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Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB)

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

John 14:25-29 (NASB)

**25 "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you.
26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. 27 "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. 28 "You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29 "Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe.**

John 15:26-27 (NLT)

**26 "But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me.
27 And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry.**

Today is Trinity Sunday, but what is Trinity Sunday?
And, Why Should We Care?

Yesterday was my 56 anniversary of being ordained, and this is the first time I have preached on the Trinity.

It's one of those doctrines that all Christians affirm but have difficulty in explaining.

3 in 1.

1 in 3.

It's hard to get your head around.

Strangely enough, the only doctrine in the church that has a day of remembrance is the Doctrine of the Trinity.

I. What Is The Trinity

Trinity Sunday is the Sunday following Pentecost, and Pentecost is 50 days after Easter.

Pope John XXII (1316–1334) ordered the day of remembrance for

the entire Church on the first Sunday after Pentecost, and on July 24, 1911, Pope Pius X said its observance carried a double blessing.

To talk about the Trinity is to talk about that which our human minds can't fathom.

Many have tried over the centuries to explain the concept of the Trinity, even though the Bible itself doesn't lay out with clear delineations and definitions the three in one and one in three theology.

Remember playing with mercury when you were in grade school? Mercury is an unusual metal because it remains in liquid form at room temperature.

This makes it both highly useful and potentially quite dangerous.

In elementary school there was a period of time when some of us would bring small pill bottles to school with a few drops of liquid mercury swimming around in the bottom.

During the duller parts of class, we would empty the contents of our bottles into the little craters on the desks that were designed to hold pencils.

We amused ourselves by taking the points of our pencils and dividing the large, single mercury bead into dozens of tiny little balls that shimmered and skittered on the desktop.

Most amazing of all was that simply by rolling the small drops back to touch each other, they were all reabsorbed back to re-create the one large, silver ball.

The liquid mercury existed both as those separate beads and as that unified mass.

When considered as one, it was seamless and whole, perfectly round and stable.

But it also existed as those separate identities, themselves completely independent and with their own character.

Many children learn in Sunday school that the Trinity is like water

— H²O — which can be a gas, a solid or a liquid but is still and always H²O at a molecular level.

Or the SS teacher spoke about the egg with its yolk, white and shell,

or they learn St. Patrick's cloverleaf metaphor.

You can probably think of a lot more of these, all trying to explain the concept of being one-in-three and three-in-one

How about pig tails on a young girl?

The British religious writer, Sara Maitland, says:

"Although many of us have grown up gratefully with St. Patrick's cloverleaf image of the Trinity -- three leaves making up one clover leaf -- there is always room for some new imagery as well. My favorite model of the Trinity is that it is like a child's pigtail. If the Trinity is seen as a braid -- three equal strands, smoothly interrelated -- there are some advantages. Firstly, you can tear one of the leaves off a clover threesome and leave the other two still related, but if you pull one of the strands out of a braid, the whole thing collapses. Inasmuch as there is a Trinitarian God, this threefold revelation makes perfect sense, and obviously the same thing applies: You cannot have any two of the sources without the third because the whole thing falls apart. At times, when braiding, it is important to look at the whole pigtail and check that the hair has been reasonably accurately divided into three." (Sara Maitland, A Big Enough God)

The Jesus Only churches with their emphasis on the second person of the Trinity has made the pigtail somewhat lopsided.

And the same can be said for the Holy Spirit charismatic movement.

We need to keep the braid uniform in size and usefulness.

We can conceptualize a braid, can we not?

But how do you conceptualize GOD?

Jesus said
John 4:24 (NASB)
24 God is spirit

Paul says
Hebrews 12:1 (NASB)
1 we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us

We can't see them, but they are there cheering us on to
Hebrews 12:1 (NASB)
1 run with endurance the race that is set before us

There is a spirit world that we just can't see.
Look at your hand.
Examine it carefully.
Wave it around, and feel the invisible air pressure.
Your hand is physical.
It's real.
You can touch it.
But the Spirit world is invisible, yet just as real.

Our government has spent an enormous amount of money on the
Search for **E**xtraterrestrial **I**ntelligence, because some scientists
believe there is life out there somewhere.
But these same scientists don't believe in God because they can't
see Him.

Some of the disciples of our Lord were trouble by that same doubt:
John 14:8 (NASB)
**8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is
enough for us."**

And, Jesus responded:
John 14:9-11 (NASB)
**9 Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to
know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father;**

how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. ¹¹ "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.

So, here Jesus is saying that He is God.
And that creates a problem, does it not?
But, what is the problem?

It's stated in what the Jews called the **Shema**:
Deuteronomy 6:4 (NASB)

4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

The word "**Shema**" in Hebrew means "**hear.**"
That verse encapsulates the monotheistic essence of Judaism.
One God. Not two.

When one of the scribes questioned Jesus regarding what is the greatest commandment, Jesus answered:

Mark 12:29 (NASB)

29 The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD;

One God, not two.

But, then Jesus gives us three Gods in one and one God in three, when He said:

Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB)

18 All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you

And, that is the Scripture the early church used to point out the

doctrine of the Trinity.

But, it is not the only Scripture that points out the doctrine of the Trinity.

Notice it says **in the name**

I'll need to come back to talk about that in a few minutes.

You see, the Trinity is a revealed doctrine.

It embodies a truth that is undiscoverable by natural means.

And, just as it is undiscoverable by reason, it is incapable of proof from reason.

You have to admit that God is unique.

There is nothing in the cosmos like Him.

And, frankly, when we conceive of God as a Trinity, new fullness, richness, and vividness are given to our conception of God as a self-conscious, loving Being.

The very fact that God *exists* means that he is a *being* and thus has a kind of essence or substance.

To say that Father, Son, and Spirit are one in essence means that the totality of divine substance, the whole of "whatever it is to be God," belongs to each of them.

The main implication of this is that each is equally divine.

In whatever sense the Father is divine, so also are the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All the attributes of divinity belong equally to each of the three.

It cannot be otherwise since they share the *same* essence.

There is no biblical term that actually means "trinity."

And, as I said last Lord's Day, this is not the connotation of the KJV word "Godhead" nor of the Greek terms which it represents.

We do find the concept of the Trinity in Scripture, however.

Exactly what is this concept?

The classical Christian doctrine is usually summed up this way:

that God is three persons who share one essence or substance. Christians have been explaining the Trinity in terms of three persons ever since Tertullian in the early third century.

II. Heresies About The Trinity

And, when we say "persons," we are applying our physical reality onto that spirit world.

When Tertullian in the early third century used the word person in reference to the Trinity, it meant something different than today. For example, if you say a young girl is cute, it considered a compliment.

However, 150 years ago, in Elizabethan English, if you called a girl "cute," you insulted her, because *cute* meant "bowlegged." Today it means something quite different.

So Tertullian was thinking of one being with three personalities.

But it helps us conceptualize God when we say He is person, singular.

Think of person, singular, as a thinking, willing center of consciousness.

That God is three persons means that within the one divine nature are three individual centers of consciousness.

Each of the persons is fully conscious of Himself as distinct from the other two and as existing in eternal interpersonal relationship with the other two.

We call these three persons God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

And, I am sure that you remember Last Lord's day when we discussed the gender of these three persons, and documented that Scripture always refers to them as of masculine gender.

When William Paul Young wrote **The Shack**, he creatively changed Scripture by having both God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit be females.

As creative as that portrayal was, Young's attempt to give the Trinity personality falls way short in capturing the essence of the God of the Bible.

This idea of the Triune God, the Trinity, is a difficult idea to grasp.

And when we are grasping for ideas, sometimes we drift into heresy.

A heresy is a doctrine or teaching that is incompatible with the Church's view of Scripture and the traditional understanding of the those who have gone before us.

And, there are many, many heresies about the Trinity.

But, there are two primary heresies about the Trinity.

Modalism and Subordinationism.

A. Modalism

There were those who said that God was One God who just appeared in three different **roles**, or modalities, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

An illustration of this is one I have heard used to describe the Trinity, but unfortunately it falls short.

I am Archie Miller.

I am minister to the Orcutt Christian Church.

I am husband to Elizabeth.

So, I am one person in three roles.

But while this sort of gets at one aspect of the Trinity, it is actually a good example of the heresy of "modalism."

One god playing three different parts.

A modern example of modalism is the "Oneness movement" among certain Pentecostal bodies, also known as the "Jesus only" Pentecostals.

B. Subordinationism

In the heresy of subordinationism, God the Father is the supreme person.

Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to Him in some way.

But this is not what the Bible teaches.

The Son is not subordinate to the Father.

The Holy Spirit is not subordinate to the Son.

Each has their preordained ways of working out our salvation.

The brilliant Presbyterian theologian of the past generation, B.B. Warfield, says

"It may be very natural to see in the designation "Son" an intimation of subordination and derivation of Being...But it is quite certain that this was not the denotation of either term in the Semitic consciousness, which underlies the phraseology of Scripture; ... What underlies the conception of sonship in Scriptural speech is just "likeness"; whatever the father is that the son is also. The emphatic application of the term "Son" to one of the Trinitarian Persons, accordingly, asserts rather His equality with the Father than His subordination to the Father;"

So, to answer these two heresies, and many other, the early church worked out creedal statements that expressed what the Church did believe.

On your bulletin is the Apostles Creed as developed in 381 A.D. When you read it, please note how the early Christians corrected the idea that God the Father was superior to God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit.

The essence of all three persons of the Godhead is the same.

John 14:11 (NASB)

11 "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.

In the Old Testament, God is Creator of both the world, and of the nation of Israel through whom he will bless the world. Of course, God is present as Spirit, and the Messiah is both prophesied and foreshadowed in various theophanies (appearances of God, such as the angel who wrestles with Jacob). But primary on the stage of the unfolding drama of the Old Testament is the God of Israel, Yahweh, El-Shaddai, Elohim, Adonai, and all the other names by which God is called and worshipped.

In the New Testament Gospel accounts, the emphasis is upon Jesus, his birth, his baptism, his message, his life, his death, and his resurrection.

But God the Father approves his Son, and the Holy Spirit descends upon and anoints Jesus for ministry.

In the New Testament Book of Acts and the epistles, the Holy Spirit is at the forefront, equipping, enabling, guiding, empowering the early church.

In the Book of Revelation, God the Father, Son, and Spirit are all present, each featured in a way that is both consistent with the Old Testament, witnesses to the New Testament, and brings fully into being the Kingdom of God in its closing chapters.

We may content ourselves with simply observing that to the New Testament there is but one only living and true God; but that to it Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are each God in the fullest sense of the term; and yet Father, Son and Spirit stand over against each other as I, and Thou, and He.

In this composite fact the New Testament gives us the doctrine of the Trinity.

III. Why Should We Care?

The reason we should care about the Trinity, and be aware of the uniqueness of the One-in-Three and Three-in-One is this because without a balanced view of all three persons of the Trinity, we can

misinterpret the work of God in this world.

We can end up with a view of the Jehovah Witnesses that denies the reality of the Holy Spirit.

Or, we can end up with the polytheistic view of the Mormons who have many gods.

And if we emphasize some aspects of God in the Old Testament, and subordinate Jesus and the Spirit, then we come away with a picture of a god of wrath and judgment, who has little compassion.

If we emphasize the person of Jesus to the exclusion of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, we miss out on the fact that God sent Jesus because **“God so loved the world...”**

Genesis 1:26 (NASB)

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

The purpose of God is to redeem the world, not just the individuals in it.

Salvation is the work of God, and that salvation extends not just to individuals but to God's creation as well.

If we emphasize the Holy Spirit, and the charismatic experiences and gifts of the Spirit, it is easy to lose sight of God as Creator, Son as Redeemer, and the role that the Holy Spirit played and plays in both of those aspects of God's work.

I recall having lunch with one of our local Christian Church ministers several years ago when we were discussing their congregation merging with Orcutt Christian Church.

He no longer preached Christ crucified.

He only preached on the Holy Spirit, and in fact, taken to speaking in tongues.

When the congregation he served disbanded, he united with a

Pentecostal group.

IV. How the Trinity Enriches our Lives

A. In the Trinity We Find Our Model For Community

As God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit relate to one another, demonstrate love for each other, and work in concert to accomplish the purpose of God in the world, we get the idea of community.

This idea of the relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit has been depicted by many Christian scholars using the term “**perichoresis.**”

That’s a Greek word which means, basically, “dancing around.”

Perichoresis is a Greek term used by the early church fathers to describe the triune relationship between each person of the Godhead.

It can be defined as co-indwelling, co-inhering, and mutual interpenetration.

Alister McGrath writes that it

"allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of a 'community of being,' in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them."

I like the implications of God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, in a divine dance, interacting with one another, expressing love for one another, and complementing the work each has to do.

John 16:12-15 (NASB)

12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. **13** "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on

His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. ¹⁵ "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

In this Trinitarian passage, we find some of these elements of mutuality.

Jesus says that the Spirit will guide his disciples, glorify Jesus, take what belongs to Jesus and give it to the disciples.

But, everything Jesus has comes from the Father, and that is why the Spirit can make it known to the disciples.

If that sounds like circular reasoning, it is.

God the Father creates.

God the Son redeems.

God the Spirit illuminates and equips.

In this divine dance of mutuality, each person of the Godhead complements and builds on the work of other members of the Trinity.

So, at the baptism of Jesus, Jesus demonstrates his obedience to the plan of God through baptism.

God the Father announces his approval, and the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus for ministry.

In the early church, the Spirit empowers, equips, and emboldens the apostles to tell the good news of Jesus, who is God's gift sent into the world to redeem it.

B. In the Trinity We Find Our Christian Mission

John 20:21 (NASB)

²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

Just as God the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus sends us

into the world to do the Father's work, equipped and accompanied by the Spirit of God.

God's work involves more than taking individuals to heaven when they die.

God's work is to bring in his kingdom on this earth, so that God's creation can know the shalom of God, the peace that says all things are as God has intended them to be.

So, God sends Jesus to bring the shalom of God, also called salvation, to the nation of Israel and to all who will respond, whether Jew or not.

Which is why Jesus teaches his disciples to pray "**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**"

The Father and Son then send the Spirit who equips, empowers, and emboldens the early apostles as well as us today.

And, salvation itself, the idea that we are right with God, proceeds from God, is incarnate in Jesus, and is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus said:

Matthew 28:19 (NASB)

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

One immersion brings the penitent believer into the name, that is, into or under the *authority*, of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Why the singular "name"?

Because the Three are in essence **One**; they have but one name, one rule, one authority.

Whatever work we have to do in this world, we do from the standpoint of the Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who created, redeemed, and enabled us to do so.

So, let me encourage you today to think about the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

But we can't stop at just thinking about a theological concept. As followers of Jesus, we are loved by the Father, saved by the Son, and led by the Spirit.

All three persons of the Godhead are at work in our lives, in the life of this church, and in the life of this world.

As we live in new awareness of God in all God's expressions as Father, Son, and Spirit, our spiritual lives will deepen, our vision of God's kingdom will expand, and the work that God has chosen for us will take on a new vitality and urgency.

Remember this:

The Scriptural basic for the doctrine of the Trinity came from our Lord who commanded us to **baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,**

What would it take for you to do what God has commanded?

Prayer and Invitation

June 11 Lesson 2 Gideon

Devotional Reading: Psalm 83:1-12, 18

Background Scripture: Judges 6-8

JUDGES 6:11-18

11 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

12 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

13 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

14 The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

15 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

16 The LORD answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”

17 Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. **18** Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”

And the LORD said, “I will wait until you return.”

KEY VERSE

When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”—Judges 6:12

Introduction

A. Against All Odds

The odds seemed to have been stacked against her, having been born into slavery in Maryland in 1822. As a child, she was often beaten and whipped by various masters. She received a head injury when a slave owner threw a heavy metal weight at another slave and hit her by mistake. The result was a lifelong struggle with epilepsy, dizziness, and pain.

Who would *not* expect such a person to live and die in obscurity? But that was not the case for Harriet Tubman! She escaped from slavery, but risked recapture as she returned to lead numerous missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved family and friends. Against all odds and led by a strong Christian faith, Harriet Tubman overcame slavery, injury, abuse, and disability. History now knows her as an abolitionist, a humanitarian, and a Union spy who helped guide a raid that freed 700 slaves during the American Civil War.

Very few people who live in Western democracies will ever face the challenges of a Harriet Tubman. Even so, we all experience what it’s like to have the odds stacked against us at one time or another. Today we will look at a judge of Israel who seemed to have little chance of success—until God stepped in!

B. Lesson Background

The lessons for this month feature four of the six major judges in the book of Judges. The previous lesson was about Deborah and Barak. This study moves directly to the next judge—Gideon, a member of the tribe of Manasseh. The final verse of Judges 5 states that Israel had rest

for 40 years after Barak defeated Sisera and the Canaanites. During that time the memory of the previous oppression began to fade. A new generation arose and began to worship other gods.

Again God allowed others to oppress Israel—Midianites, Amalekites, etc. (Judges 6:3). The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:2). When Moses fled from Egypt, he settled in Midian and married a daughter of a priest in Midian (Exodus 2:15, 16, 21).

The Amalekites had Esau as their progenitor (Genesis 36:10, 16). The Amalekites attacked the Israelites after they left Egypt and as they were approaching Sinai (Exodus 17:8-16). That was the battle when Israel would prevail only when Moses raised his hands. After the battle Moses stated that there would be war against Amalek from generation to generation.

These two groups, plus “other eastern peoples” (a general name for eastern groups of Arabs), came against Israel in great numbers. For seven years they came and destroyed the crops and livestock of the Israelites (Judges 6:1, 4).

After seven years the Israelites cried to the Lord (Judges 6:7). The Lord sent a prophet to remind Israel of what he had done for them when they came out of Egypt and to rebuke them for their disobedience (vv. 8-10). This condemnation by God’s prophet is immediately before the text for today. God then moved to prepare another judge to deliver his penitent people.

It had been 47 years since Deborah and Barak, with God’s help, subdued the Canaanites: 40 years of peace (Judges 5:31), followed by the 7 years of oppression (6:1). The approximate date for the events of this lesson has been determined to be about 1175 BC.

I. Big Trouble

(Judges 6:11-13)

A. Cowering Warrior (vv. 11, 12)

11a. The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah

The first verse of the lesson provides several facts. It contains three personalities, explanations about them, two helps to identify the place of the event, the strange action that one of them is doing, and why he is doing it.

The *angel of the Lord* is the first person mentioned. The word *angel* may also be given as *messenger*, so a messenger of the Lord comes and sits *under the oak tree in Ophrah*. This town is in the territory of Manasseh (Judges 6:15). Later information about it is very negative (8:27; 9:5).

There are dozens of references in the Old Testament to “the angel of the Lord” or “the angel of God” (Judges 6:20). The first is Genesis 16:7, in the days of Abraham. This being makes the ground holy, as in Exodus 3:2-5 when Moses is first called to lead Israel from Egypt, or when he is called “the commander of the Lord’s army” in Joshua 5:15. This being receives worship and sacrifices. The terminology may change to “commander of the army of the Lord” (Joshua 5:14). The “angel of the Lord” appearing in Exodus 3:2 says “I am ... God” in Exodus 3:6. The angel of the Lord is mentioned in chapters 2, 5, 6, and 13 in the book of Judges.

Many have suggested that this is actually Jesus, God’s divine messenger who appears as a man in the Old Testament era and then comes in the New Testament as one who experiences the totality of life in the flesh. In this regard, “messenger” would be intended, since angels do not receive worship (Revelation 22:8, 9; compare Hebrews 1:1-9).

11b. that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

Joash the Abiezrite and his family are of the tribe of Manasseh (Judges 6:15). Manasseh was the older son of Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 41:51), and Abiezer was a former leader in the tribe (see Joshua 17:2).

The third personality in this verse is Gideon, a son of Joash. Judges 8:19 indicates that Gideon had brothers and that they had been killed by the Midianites. This could have caused him to have differing emotions about the invaders—anger, vengeance, and a certain fear for what they could do to him and others.

In this verse Gideon's task is to thresh wheat. Threshing is usually accomplished by using a sledge pulled by animals. Gideon's method is different, for he is hiding. The word used means that he is using a stick to beat the wheat. The result is the same—the seed is separated from the chaff and straw.

His place of work is strange—a *winepress*. This type of winepress is made by excavating rock to form a recessed area where grapes could be smashed by walking on them. The juice then runs in a trough to a collecting vat. Gideon is hiding so that the Midianites will have difficulty seeing him. It may be imagined that he is muffling the sound as much as he can.

12. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

To say that *the angel of the Lord* appears means that he makes his presence known, not that he has been invisible for a while as he sat under the oak tree. Gideon is absorbed in his work, and the noise of his beating the grain stalks can drown out the sounds of someone nearby.

The greeting to Gideon has two parts: a statement that *the Lord is with* him and that Gideon is *mighty*. Concerning the latter, the majority view is that he will become such a person because of what is about to happen. The minority opinion is that Gideon has already distinguished

himself in combat, given that he is able to recruit a sizable army (Judges 7:3). The angel's statement carries with it a humorous contradiction—that a man of such courage is hiding.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways Christians send contradictory, mixed messages to the culture at large? How do we fix this problem?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning mixed messages about Christianity in general

Concerning mixed messages about individual Christians

Two Midianite leaders affirm later that Gideon resembles a prince (Judges 8:18). He therefore has physical features that help him to be a leader among men.

B. Missing Miracles (v. 13)

13. “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

Gideon begins to question the stranger. Little does Gideon know that he is trying to debate God! This is indicated by the first *lord* in the verse. The four letters are not all capital letters; the word involved could easily be translated as *sir* as the same Hebrew word is in Genesis 23:6. By contrast, as Gideon uses the word LORD (all capital letters), he is referring to Yahweh (three times), the sacred name of God. This is explained more fully in the front matter of many Bibles.

Gideon's questions reveal that he is aware of the glorious history of Israel. In his family, these things are being told by the older generation to the younger. Gideon knows about the bondage in Egypt and the miraculous events that followed. This includes the 10 plagues, the

crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of the Law, the 40 years in the wilderness, and the crossing of the Jordan when it was in flood stage.

After the questions, Gideon makes a statement that is really seeking an answer for the oppression that he, his family, and his people are enduring. Gideon has heard about the wonderful works of God in the past, but now it seems to him that God is no longer concerned about his people.

What Do You Think?

How can we resist thinking that God has abandoned us? What will happen if we don't?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In cases that affect you alone

When feelings of abandonment swirl around your group (family, Sunday school class, etc.)

When feelings of abandonment sweep across the nation

II. Weak Tribe

(Judges 6:14-16)

A. Promised Presence (v. 14)

14. The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

The speaker is now not referred to as an angel, but as *the Lord* (again, Yahweh). We notice immediately that the Lord does not answer Gideon’s questions. Instead, he looks at Gideon and commands that he *go in the strength* he has. Gideon is the one who will *save Israel* from the Midianite oppressors.

Then God asks a question of his own: *Am I not sending you?* This question has the force of a command. Obedience to this command is necessary, for the command is from the God of Israel, the only God there is.

What Do You Think?

What have you found to be the most reliable indicators of God's will?
Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding bigger "callings"

Regarding smaller, daily activities

Considering the cautions of Job 42:7; Proverbs 15:22; James 4:13-17;
1 John 4:1; Revelation 22:18, 19

B. Puny Pedigree (v. 15)

15. "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

Gideon does not like the oppression, but he does not think much of the idea of being the leader that lifts it either! So he responds with a question and statements about his unsuitability for such an important task. He suggests that he is a nobody. Gideon is not the first person to resist God's call to leadership. Moses had similar reactions when charged to deliver Israel from years of oppression in Egypt (see Exodus 3:10-4:17).

"I'M NOT OK?"

The book *I'm OK, You're OK* hit the *New York Times* best-seller list in 1972 and remained there for two years. This was an early book promoting what became known as Transactional Analysis. The book's thesis is that relational problems can be addressed if we analyze our interactions with one another as transactions.

The author speaks of four life positions one takes in relationship transactions. They are (1) I'm not OK, You're OK, (2) I'm not OK, You're not OK, (3) I'm OK, You're not OK, and (4) I'm OK, You're OK. When God called Gideon to serve him, Gideon responded in the *I'm not OK, You're OK* position. He listed reason after reason why he was not good enough to answer God's call. Although this may sound like humility, it showed that Gideon was leaving God out of the transaction.

In essence, God responded from the *I'm OK, You're OK* position. This position affirmed what Gideon could accomplish with divine help.

Most of us have areas in our self-perception in which we think *I'm not OK*. However, our relationship with God in Christ helps us realize that even though we are sinners, we have become new creatures. We are capable of doing whatever God calls us to do with him. He does not call us to service only to abandon us later! —C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to overcome feelings of inadequacy when sensing God's call to a task?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the content of prayer

Regarding the counsel sought of others

Regarding examples from Scripture

Other

C. Sure Success (v. 16)

16. The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

The phrasing *all ... leaving none alive* is an interpretive rendering of what would be "as one man" if the underlying Hebrew were translated rigidly word for word. Either way, in the battle to come it will seem as if Gideon is winning it all by himself! (The *you* in *you will strike down* is singular.) Assurance of victory is most welcome, but should there be some type of sign or proof that the source of this prediction is God?

III. Security Sought

(Judges 6:17, 18)

A. Asking for a Sign (v. 17)

17. Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me."

Gideon wants to know of a certainty that what he is concluding is true. Before he undertakes the difficult and dangerous task of gathering an army, he needs to know that what he is getting himself into has a good chance of succeeding. His politeness is shown in the phrase *if now I have found favor in your eyes* that prefaces his request for *a sign*.

Gideon's caution does not necessarily demonstrate a lack of faith. The somewhat aggressive nature of his responses thus far seems to indicate that the guest has the appearance of just an ordinary man (contrast Judges 13:6). Gideon may be assuming that the messenger is a prophet, but still he wants a sign. Even Moses expressed a concern that the people of Israel would not believe him, so God gave him signs that he could employ to show that the source of his commission was none other than God himself (Exodus 4:1-9).

SEEING ANGELS AND SEEKING SIGNS

Many people testify that they have experienced the presence of so-called guardian angels. Some even claim to have video proof! An Internet search for "angel appearances," etc., will result in numerous hits. One video shows a figure with glowing hands appearing from nowhere to rescue a bicyclist who was hit broadside in an intersection by a truck. Immediately after the apparent collision, the figure and the victim disappear from the point of impact, only to be seen several yards away with the crash victim getting off a stretcher and limping to the curb. The figure that helped him is walking away.

Another site tells the story of a Christian man who survived a "10,000 pound truck axle" that crushed him while two angels came to his aid to save his life. He experienced what is said to be a "miraculous recovery." Of course, it is possible for digital footage to be faked. Yet however we explain such matters, numerous biblical passages confirm angelic appearances.

In Gideon's case, the angel's presence gave him the needed courage to go into battle for the Lord. But does that mean it's wise to anticipate, or

even request, a visit of an angel? There is no indication that Gideon did either!

For those today seeking angelic visitation as a sign of some kind, the words of Jesus serve to remind that “a wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign,” but the only sign he offered the people was “the sign of Jonah” (Matthew 16:4). Our faith is strengthened by the ever-present reality of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, not by a once-in-a-lifetime visit by an angel. —C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

In addition to studying Scripture together, how would you counsel a fellow Christian who claims to receive signs from God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When the claim involves receiving miraculous signs

When the claim involves receiving non-miraculous signs

B. Receiving Assurance (v. 18)

18. “Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”

And the LORD said, “I will wait until you return.”

Gideon seeks assurance that his unexpected visitor will not make an unexpected exit, and the request is honored. The messenger promises to remain until Gideon returns.

The word that Gideon uses for his special gift (*my offering*) usually refers to a grain offering, similar to what is described in Leviticus 2. This may be a time of scarcity, but Gideon is still able to provide a meal for his unusual guest. Gideon probably anticipated that a miraculous sign of some sort after the meal will further credential the messenger and his message. Gideon wants to be certain that this is a commission from the Lord.

A sign is indeed given, but not in the way Gideon may anticipate. The verses that follow reveal that Gideon prepares a young goat, bread, and broth. The angel tells him to place the meat and unleavened bread on a

rock (which is about to serve as an altar) and to pour out the broth. It is assumed that the broth is poured on the offerings. The angel then touches these gifts with the end of his staff. Fire erupts from the rock and consumes the gifts. The angel then vanishes from sight (compare Judges 13:20).

After Gideon recruits his army from four tribes, he asks for another sign to make certain that the Lord really will deliver Israel through him (see Judges 6:36-40). First, Gideon says he will place a fleece on the threshing floor. He wants the fleece to have dew on it the next morning, but the ground surrounding it to be dry. It happens.

But Gideon wants even more of these blessed assurances. It is natural for dew to evaporate more quickly from other surfaces, so he asks that the procedure be reversed on the next morning. That is, he desires that the fleece be dry, and that the ground be covered with dew.

But that is not the end of the story. If Gideon can ask for signs, then God himself can also make some unusual requests! After Gideon recruits 32,000 men (Judges 7:3) to go against 135,000 Midianites (8:10), God states that his army is too big! He instructs Gideon to reduce his fighting force to 10,000 and then to a mere 300. Thus the force ratio increases from more than 4-to-1 against Gideon's army to 450-to-1. But that is just right for God. The remainder of Judges 7 through 8:28 gives the account of Gideon's thrilling victory that results in 40 years of peace.

How to Say It

Abiezer *Ay-buy-ee-zur*.

Abiezrite *Ay-buy-ez-rite*.

Amalek *Am-uh-lek*.

Amalekites *Am-uh-leh-kites* or *Uh-mal-ih-kites*.

Barak *Bair-uk*.

Canaanites *Kay-nun-ites*.

Esau *Ee-saw*.

Keturah *Keh-too-ruh*.

Manasseh *Muh-nass-uh*.

Midian *Mid-ee-un*.

Midianites *Mid-ee-un-ites*.
Ophrah *Ahf-ruh*.
Sinai *Sigh-nye* or *Sigh-nay-eye*.
Sisera *Sis-er-uh*.
Yahweh (*Hebrew*) *Yah-weh*.

Conclusion

A. What's Your Excuse?

Gideon was called by God for a special task, and the man went to work to deliver his people. God had Gideon employ an unusual strategy (see Judges 7:16-25), and the sword of the Lord won a great victory.

If God were to tell you that he had special plans for you, how would you respond? Perhaps your excuses sound like some of these: *I'm too weak; I'm tired; I don't know what to say; I can't do it alone; Everyone is against me; Nobody cares about me; This world is changing so fast; Satan is making my life miserable; I just feel lost; I can't do anything right!*

Like Gideon, we may be tempted to answer a perceived call from God with excuses. But each of these excuses and more are answered in promises God gives to those who trust him. When God calls, he also provides the resources for us to answer.

B. Prayer

Thank you, O God, for the promise of your presence in the battles against sin and for giving the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ—regardless. We pray this in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God plus one is a majority.
Standard Lesson Commentary 2016-2017 (NIV)

