

Judges 6:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

Analysis

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Gideon's protest mirrors Moses' reluctance (Exodus 3:11, 4:10) and Jeremiah's youth objection (Jeremiah 1:6). His reasoning emphasizes double inadequacy: family-level ('my family is poor') and personal-level ('I am the least'). The Hebrew *dalli* (דָלִי, 'weak, poor, helpless') describes his clan's insignificance within Manasseh. The phrase 'I am the least' (*anochi hatza'ir*, I am the youngest/smallest) echoes David's status as youngest (1 Samuel 16:11) and Saul's tribal humility (1 Samuel 9:21). These protests reveal human tendency to evaluate calling by natural qualifications rather than divine empowerment.

God consistently chooses the foolish, weak, and insignificant to shame the wise and mighty (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). This pattern ensures glory belongs to God, not human achievement. Gideon's weakness magnifies God's strength (2 Corinthians 12:9). Yet Gideon's protest also reveals unbelief—God just declared His presence ('I will be with thee,' v. 16), yet Gideon focuses on human inadequacy. True faith rests on God's promises and presence, not personal qualifications. Abraham believed God despite being childless and aged (Romans 4:18-21); disciples left nets despite being uneducated fishermen (Matthew 4:18-22).

Theologically, this illustrates the tension between divine sovereignty and human

responsibility. God sovereignly chooses and empowers, yet humans must respond in faith-filled obedience. Gideon's inadequacy is real—he couldn't deliver Israel through natural ability. But God's call transforms inadequate people into adequate instruments. The key isn't self-confidence but God-confidence—trusting not in personal ability but in God's promise and power.

Historical Context

Manasseh was one of Israel's largest tribes (Numbers 26:34), though divided between east Jordan (half-tribe) and west Jordan territories. Gideon's clan Abiezer (Joshua 17:2, Numbers 26:30) was prominent within western Manasseh, making his claim of poverty possibly strategic humility or reflecting devastation under Midianite oppression. His father Joash maintained a Baal altar (v. 25), showing economic resources contradicting poverty claims.

Birth order significantly affected inheritance and status in ancient Near East. Firstborn sons received double portions (Deuteronomy 21:17), while younger sons received less. Being 'least' meant minimal inheritance expectations and reduced family status. However, God frequently chose younger sons—Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over older brothers, David over seven brothers, Solomon over Adonijah. This pattern demonstrates God's sovereign election transcending human customs.

Gideon's protest reflects ancient honor-shame culture where family status and personal standing determined social position and authority. Leadership typically came from prominent families with wealth, military success, and established reputations. Gideon's argument—insignificant family + youngest son = unqualified for national leadership—made sense in cultural context. Yet God's kingdom inverts worldly values: 'the last shall be first' (Matthew 20:16), 'blessed are the meek' (Matthew 5:5), 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble' (James 4:6).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What inadequacies do you focus on that prevent embracing God's calling despite His promise to be with you?
2. How does God's pattern of choosing the weak, foolish, and insignificant challenge worldly leadership criteria?
3. When has awareness of personal inadequacy driven you to deeper dependence on God versus paralyzing unbelief?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלָּיו בְּבִן אָדָם בְּמִתְהָרֵךְ אַתָּה אָוֹשֵׁעַ
And he said unto him Oh my Lord wherewith shall I save

וְאַנְךָ בְּמִנְשָׁה הַיְשְׁרָאֵל
Israel behold my family is poor in Manasseh

וְאַתָּה בָּתְהַרְמָךְ אֶבְרִי
and I am the least house in my father's

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 9:21 (References Israel): And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?

Exodus 3:11 (References Israel): And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

Jeremiah 1:6 (References Lord): Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

Exodus 4:10 (References Lord): And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

Ephesians 3:8 (Parallel theme): Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Jeremiah 50:45 (References Lord): Therefore hear ye the counsel of the LORD, that he hath taken against Babylon; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitation desolate with them.

1 Corinthians 15:9 (Parallel theme): For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Luke 1:34 (Parallel theme): Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

1 Samuel 18:23 (Parallel theme): And Saul's servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?

Micah 5:2 (References Israel): But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.