

# A HERO WILL RISE

The Book of Judges

Text  
Judges 6:25-32

Topic  
The Angel of the Lord instructs Gideon to use his father's bull to demolish the altar of Baal, then sacrifice it on an altar he'd build for Jehovah

Title  
*"BullDead City"*

## Introduction

The most exhilarating live television event of 1986 wasn't the Bears 46-10 trouncing of the Patriots in the Super Bowl.

It was a few months later when millions of viewers were taken on a digging expedition in the basement of an old Chicago hotel with the goal of finding buried treasure.

**Do you remember where you were when Geraldo Rivera opened Al Capone's vault on April 21, 1986?**

The two-hour special on *Fox* proved to be a total bust when nothing but debris was found.

A little over a year later, a safe and a satchel raised from the wreck of the *Titanic* were opened on live television. Telly Savalas hosted.

It yielded soggy bank notes, coins and jewelry, including a gold pendant with a small diamond and the inscription, "May This Be Your Lucky Star."

Have you ever prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart?" (Psalm 139:23).

When you do, you're inviting the Lord to open your heart, and to show you what treasure, or what trash, He sees within it.

The Bible describes various conditions, or characteristics, of the human heart:

- When He explained to His disciples the Parable of the Sower, Jesus spoke of the hard heart, the shallow heart, the crowded heart, and the good heart.
- In the Book of Hebrews, we are warned to not harden our hearts (3:8).

In the Old Testament God exposed what was hidden in the hearts of some men. He said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, these men have set up their **idols in their hearts**, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity" (14:3).

Earlier God had said to His prophet,

Eze 8:6 ... "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations."

Eze 8:7 So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall.

Eze 8:8 Then He said to me, "Son of man, dig into the wall"; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door.

Eze 8:9 And He said to me, "Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there."

Eze 8:10 So I went in and saw, and there - every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and **all the idols of the house of Israel**, portrayed all around on the walls.

I think we'd all agree that idols are definitely something we don't want found in our hearts; nor do we want to have anything that could be considered an idol in our daily lives.

In our verses in Judges, Gideon has to deal with his family's idols. We can use his experiences as a backdrop to discuss idols in our hearts, idols in our lives, and what to do about them.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 In Your Heart There Be Idols That Need Exposing, and #2 In Your World There Be Idols That Need Opposing.

## #1 In Your Heart There Be Idols That Need Exposing

(v25-27)

When I say "idol," your mind probably flashes on a particular object of wood or stone that is said to represent a god in one of the world religions.

I always think of the Buddha statues. Have you wondered why the Buddha is fat? It doesn't seem very Buddhist.

Today we're not talking about bowing before some man-made object of worship. That is too obvious.

What, then, is an idol? Usually when the subject comes up in a Bible study, we say, "Anything can be or can become an idol." While that is a true statement, it's not helpful. If anything can be or become an idol, I get overwhelmed from the start, and I tend to only give a cursory glance at what is going on in my life.

The list is simply too long for my attention span, so I think of one or two things that are considered idols, and if I'm not openly in sin, I think I'm OK.

We need a better definition of an idol. I read a lot of them, but I like most this one: "Taking some incomplete joy of this world and building your entire life on it."

It was said by Alexis de Tocqueville, a political scientist and historian, famous for his book, *Democracy in America*.

Idols are the things we believe will bring joy. For "joy" we could substitute happiness, or satisfaction.

Most of our idols, therefore, are good things that we elevate to ultimate things, believing that if we build our lives on them, we will have joy.

One author said this: "The human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them."

If you are a Christian, what is ultimate in your life? It is your salvation in Jesus Christ, and your personal relationship with Him. Everything else must take a back seat to Jesus.

When it doesn't, it becomes your idol, but it cannot ever satisfy you, and, in fact, it will destroy you.

If anything becomes more ultimate than God to your life, then it is an idol.

Anything? One of Jesus' hard sayings was, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

That sounds so harsh. We try to soften it by saying that by "hate" He really means "love less than Me." Or that your love for Jesus is to be so great that your love for others only seems like hate.

I think it's better to see this in the context of idolatry. Family is a good thing; it is a very good thing. There is lots of instruction in the Bible for fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, and brothers and sisters.

However, marriage and family is not the ultimate thing, and it can become your idol.

When Jesus says to "hate," He means, I think, you should be certain marriage and family does not dethrone Him from the ultimate place in your heart. You should "hate" the thought of them replacing Him.

And it's for your own good, because no matter how hard you try, you cannot guarantee your marriage will succeed, or that your children won't fail. The only thing you can be certain of is that Jesus loves you with an everlasting love, and that whatever life has for you, He will never, not ever, leave you or forsake you.

Those are some ideas about heart-idolatry to keep in mind while we watch Gideon deal with idols in his family.

Jdg 6:25 Now it came to pass the same night that the LORD said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that *is* beside it;

The Angel of the Lord, Who we've said is an Old Testament pre-incarnate appearance on the earth of Jesus, had just called upon Gideon to deliver Israel from Midianite oppression.

The more we learn about Gideon, the less we would we would have chosen him. You can say he was just being a good son, but he tolerated the altar and the idol in his house. In fact we'll see in a moment that the altar and the idol were a center of idol worship for the entire community.

Gideon's house was idol central; it was an idol resort for Ophrah.

Gideon was an idolator and, sadly, he would end his life still dabbling with idols. At the end of his story, in chapter eight, we'll read, "Then Gideon made... an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house" (8:27).

I'm not saying he wasn't saved. He certainly was; he was an inductee to the Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11:32). But you can't excuse the pull that idols had on his heart.

One lesson for us: God is gracious even in our failings. Do you struggle against sin, and even the same sin over-and-over? God's grace is greater than your sin.

You should never take your sin lightly, but you should be thankful for God's promise to forgive you seventy-times-seven every day.

I think the greater lesson is to realize that, even if God is using you, it doesn't mean you can't have idols in your heart; and you probably do.

Gideon was about to destroy the household altar and idol. But idolatry remained deeply rooted in his heart.

He was instructed to tear down the altar to Baal, and destroy "the wooden image" beside it. The image represented Astarte, the female cohort of Baal.

I think it's safe to assume that it was in the vicinity of this altar and image that orgies regularly took place - because that is how Canaanite worship was conducted.

It would seem that Gideon grew-up with a steady diet of perverted Canaanite worship right in his backyard.

God, what were you thinking choosing Gideon? Same thing He is always thinking: That none of us is worthy, but His grace is sufficient.

Jdg 6:26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down."

In verse twenty-four, Gideon built an altar on the rock where the Lord had consumed a sacrifice. Here in verse twenty-six I think it's that same altar, not another one.

God would not want His altar on the high place where Baal's had been. So verse twenty-four was looking forward to this altar, and the verses we are studying today give us additional information.

Bulls were extremely valuable in their culture. There is some confusion in the wording as to whether or not there were two bulls, or just one prize bull. The description of the bull as "second" could be translated "prime" - "take the prime (prize) bull."

In 2013, Miles McKee, a bull from Idaho, was sold for a whopping \$600,000, almost doubling the previous Guinness world record price of \$301,000 for a cattle sale.

To wake up and be without your prize bull was going to be quite an economic shock to the whole family.

Following the Lord can be costly - both emotionally and financially. But the spiritual gain certainly overwhelms any physical or material loss.

Jdg 6:27 So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the LORD had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do *it* by day, he did *it* by night.

Commentators say he did this at night out of cowardice. Maybe; but I don't think so. This was always meant to be a night mission; a stealth mission. Had he tried this during the day, his father's guys, and the men of the city, would certainly have intervened. It was a rational fear.



Besides that, the Lord came to him *at night*, telling him to destroy the altar, and Gideon must have thought He meant right now.

I've been critical of Gideon, but here he obeys immediately, at great personal risk. People are complicated. We can be spiritual one moment, then carnal the next. We should give one another a lot of space to be growing in the Lord.

Our first application is obvious: Just as there were idols in Gideon's house, there might be idols in your heart.

One pastor went so far as to call the human heart "an idol factory."

Idolatry is a massive subject in the Bible. We're told that "covetousness is idolatry." Listen to what one commentator said about covetousness:

"To *covet* is to long after another's property to enjoy it as one's own. It is indulging in thoughts that lead to actions named in the other commandments. Grasping thoughts lead to grasping deeds.

Coveting normally arises from two sources:

1. First, it begins with a perception of beauty; we desire to possess a thing because it looks good to us.
2. Second, it comes from an inclination for something more abstract, like a desire for power.

The first almost always arises externally because the attraction comes through the senses.

The second generally arises internally through dwelling upon how the abstract possession will better the self. Both are equally bad."

We are definitely prone to idolatry, but even more so if we do not invite the Lord to search us, and to know us, with the goal of revealing what, or who, may have dethroned Him from being the ultimate in our hearts.

I already mentioned family; now let's use the church as an example. Ministry can become an idol. In the Book of the Revelation, Jesus let the church at Ephesus know that they had left their first love. We might therefore say that He was no longer ultimate in their hearts.

What had dethroned Jesus? All good things, like proper doctrine, and zeal to expose false teachers, and a multitude of good works.

Jesus demanded they repent or He would "remove their lamp stand" - meaning that their witness for Him would cease.

Gideon must destroy the idols in his house. Nothing else mattered first - not finishing the secret threshing he had been doing, and not going forth to deliver Israel from her enemies.

We must discover and then destroy idols in our hearts. Don't leave thinking "Anything can be an idol." Leave asking God, "What are my idols?" Then destroy them, at any cost.

## #2 In Your World There Be Idols That Need Opposing

(v28-32)

The Billy L. Nabors Demolition Company mistakenly tore down a duplex at 7601 Calypso Drive in Rowlett, Texas, instead of a duplex at 7601 Cousteau Drive, one block away.

They had identified the house using Google Maps - which turned out to be wrong on this occasion.

When the town of Ophrah awoke, the city's altar and idol seemed to have been wrongfully demolished.

Jdg 6:28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that *was* beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar *which had been* built.

Joshua uttered the famous words, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Gideon's overnight altar destruction and construction said the same thing through action. The altar to Baal was demolished, and a bull was still smoldering on a brand new altar to Jehovah, announcing boldly that there was a new sheriff in town.

Jdg 6:29 So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."

It's telling that they did not have a suspect. No one came to mind. It means that there was no one in that town who had any inkling of worshipping Jehovah.

If you're a Christian, it's fun to be suspected of doing something good, that promotes holiness and points to Jesus. As a salesman years ago I was called into my boss's office and told I could no longer pass-out tracts while on the job. I complied, but I was pretty excited about getting busted.

Jdg 6:30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it."

This is ironic because it was they who ought to have been put to death for their Baal worship.

Gideon was home, not hiding. While we can't be sure if he knew the extreme reaction that the men would have, it shows Holy Spirit boldness to be somewhere that he could be easily found.

Jdg 6:31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!"

Gideon's dad had the altar and idol on his property. It gave him high social standing. It made him somebody in Ophrah. He probably hosted orgies, and threw epic after-parties.

All that had changed overnight.

Not only that, but as I previously mentioned, Joash was out at least one bull, so he had taken a big financial hit. It was the Israelite version of Wall Street crashing.

On top of that, his son had gone behind his back, and would tell some crazy story about being commanded by the Angel of the Lord.

Welcome to Joash's very own not so good, very bad day.

His reaction was surprising. He argued that the offended party wasn't the men of the city; it was Baal himself. Let Baal take care of it.

Did Joash think Baal would act? Or was he being used by God to declare that all the idols men bow down to are powerless?

Probably both.

At any rate, he issued a challenge to Baal, to take on Gideon himself. Elijah would do something like that later in Israel's history, only on a grander scale. He would invite 450 prophets of Baal to call upon their god to consume a sacrifice. After they failed, Elijah would call upon the Lord, and He'd send fire from heaven. Then Elijah would kill those false prophets.

I can't tell if Joash was crazy like a fox, or just crazy. He may have thought Baal would do something.

Jdg 6:32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."

Jim Croce had a knack for writing songs about dethroned individuals. Jim Walker was big and dumb as a man can come, but stronger than a country hoss; and when the bad folks all got together at night, you know they all called big Jim boss.

That is, until Big Jim hit the floor and found out that you don't mess around with Slim.

Gideon was the Slim in this story, having taken out Baal, and that deserved a new nickname, which meant, "Let Baal Contend."

It may be that the men of the city prayed to Baal, all day, to come. He didn't, and that would serve as the set-up for Gideon's exploits against the Midianites.

This part of the story is about Gideon in public. He was identified with tearing-down the idol.

We need to go public against idols. The obvious idols in our modern world are sex, money, and power.

I would normally launch into explanations and illustrations of how sex, money, and power are idols. I don't need to do that, because, if you are a Christian, you already know that they are.

You've dethroned some of them in your own life; or you're struggling against them right now; or you see them in the lives of others.

What we need is the encouragement to go public against them. We do that, first and foremost, by living-out biblical values in those areas.

For example God has a lot to say about sex... And it's not at all old fashioned and out-of-date or out-of-step. There's a whole book about sex in the Bible. It's the Song of Solomon, and it's downright explicit.

Sex is a gift from God, and to enjoy it to the fullest it must be between a biological man and a biological woman, in a monogamous marriage, that is protected by mutual vows to last as long as both are alive.

When I say "enjoyed to the fullest," I'm talking about a lot more than the physical pleasure. I'm talking about the spiritual wholeness and satisfaction that cannot be experienced outside of marriage, or in a relationship between two men, or two women.

**It cannot be experienced because we were created by God and spiritually wired by Him. Only when we walk in His truth about sex, revealed in His Word, can we be truly satisfied.**

We could say similar things about money, and about power. The point is this: Simply, but powerfully, walk with the Lord according to His Word, and you will be tearing down idols that characterize our culture, and that are destroying people all around you who are enslaved to them.

If that seems too easy, it's not, for at least two reasons:

1. First, it's not easy to simply, but powerfully, walk with the Lord because we can be harboring idols in our own hearts.
2. Second, it's not easy to simply, but powerfully, walk with the Lord because the world system, overruled by Satan, is desensitizing us to idolatry by making evil good. Just think of the rapid progress of the sexual revolution that is seeking to completely destroy biblical marriage and family in favor of perversions.

Nonbelievers and believers who throw-off God's teaching on sex, money, and power are slaves. They seem free and happy-go-lucky; they seem unbound, and therefore to be enjoying life off of the Christian reservation.

If that's the case, why is the abuse and addiction to prescription drugs higher than ever, and rising? All those "free" people can't cope.

**They can't cope because there is Someone missing from their lives. It's Jesus.**

God has placed eternity in the hearts of men and women (Ecclesiastes 3:11). It presents as an emptiness that we try to fill in various ways with idols, but can't because only God can fill it.

If you are a believer, get the Lord searching your heart, to show you idols, and potential idols. Seek and destroy them, with God's capable help.

If you are not a believer, you are commanded by God's Word to "turn *to* God *from* idols" (First Thessalonians 1:9).

Do it today; do it now.